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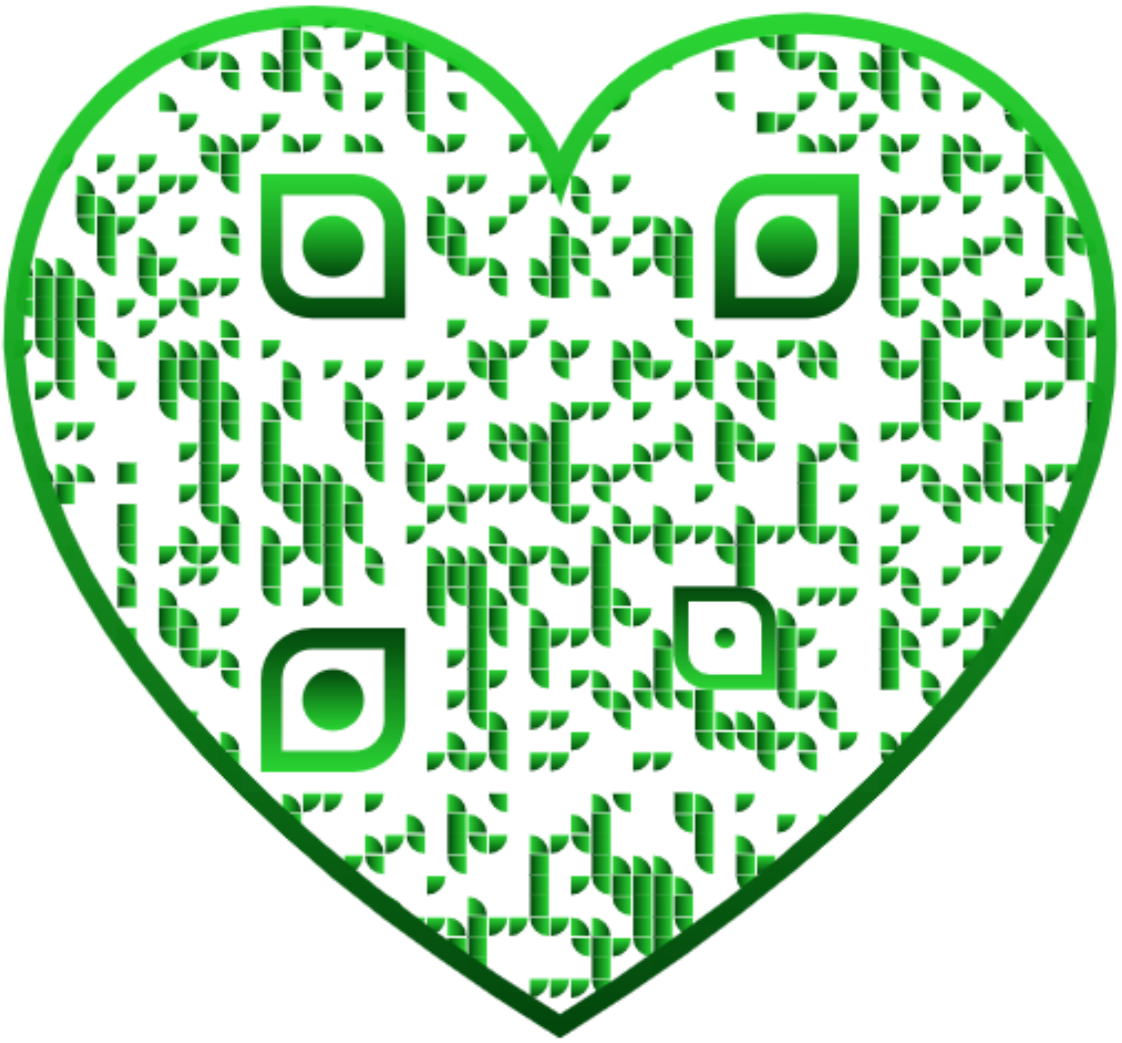

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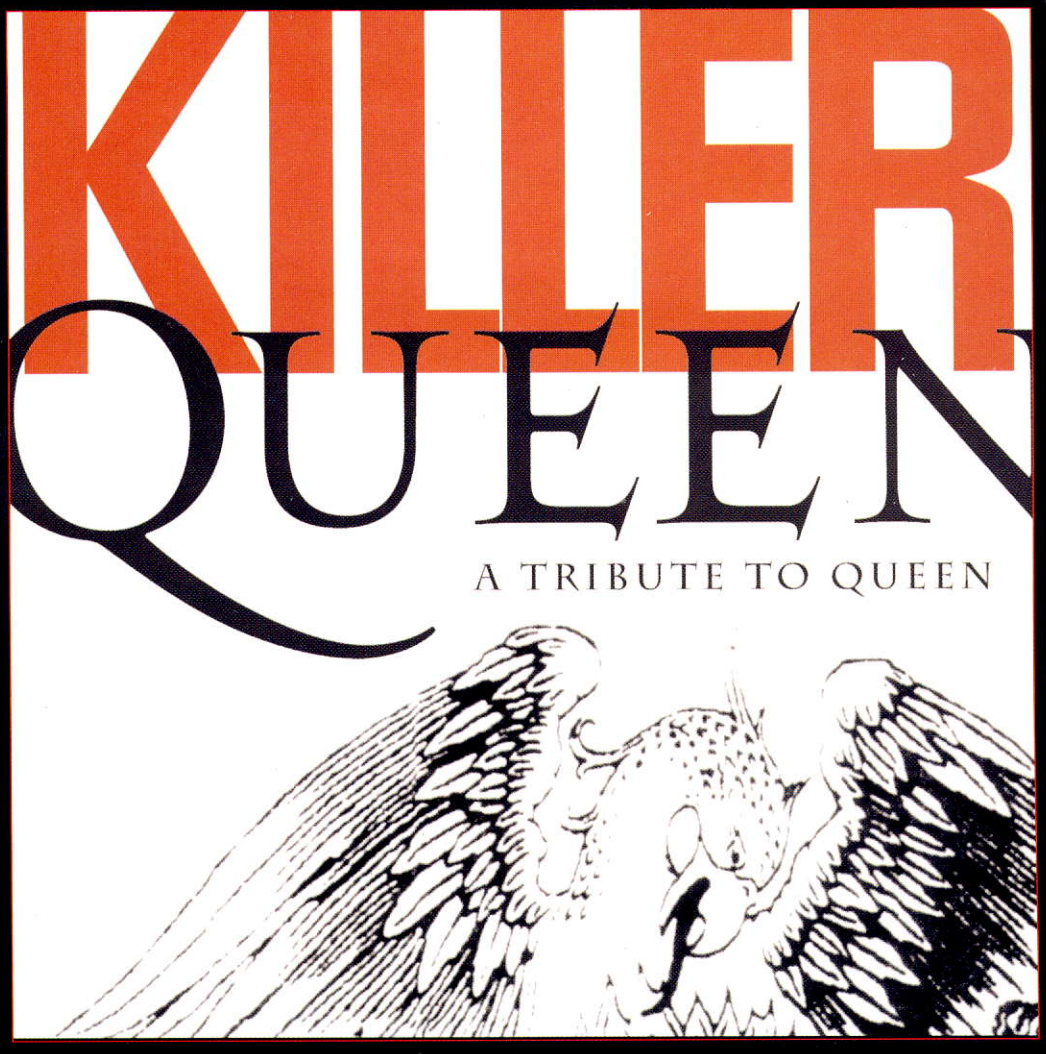

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The Future Network plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FNET).
ISSN 1045-6295

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COVER PHOTOGRAPH BY MICK ROCK † STARFILE

REPRINTED FROM *UNCUT*, MARCH 2005

ROCK IN THE ROYAL TRADITION

From their formation in 1970, Queen pushed the boundaries musically, visually and commercially. This is the story of how they rose to power, created a dynasty and became part of rock's elite aristocracy.
ALSO: *Brian May on Queen's comeback.*

by Jon Wilde
Additional reporting by Nigel Williamson

Photo session for *Queen II*, London, 1974

MICK ROCK/STAR FILE

HALLOWEEN, 1978. Queen are preparing to party on a scale far beyond what might be considered practical, plausible or remotely possible. "Excess all areas" is their credo. Indeed, singer Freddie Mercury lays fair claim to coining the phrase.

On the back of "Bohemian Rhapsody" and subsequent albums (*A Night at the Opera*, *A Day at the Races*, *News of the World*), Queen have become just about the biggest band on the planet. Not only are they insanely popular but they're absurdly wealthy and immoderate: "The Cecil B. DeMille of rock," as Mercury proclaimed, a reference to early American cinema's master of spectacle.

Mercury has established himself as the ringmaster of Queen's famed social gatherings. Every one of these is a no-expense-spared Freddie Mercury production. And, he decides, the launch party for new album *Jazz* will be the most outrageous in history.

A budget of £200,000 (approximately $350,000) has been decided upon, then conveniently forgotten after Mercury declares: "Fuck the cost, darlings, let us live a little." A venue has been chosen—the Fairmont, an elegant hotel in the French Quarter of New Orleans. A guest list of 500—including rock and movie stars, friends and loyal journalists—has been drawn up, and the food and drink—oysters, lobsters, the world's finest caviar and vats of Cristal—have been ordered. All that's left to organize is the entertainment.

According to Bob Gibson, the L.A.-based publicist in charge of the evening's festivities, "Freddie decided that he wanted to bring in a lot of street people to liven things up. I was instructed to find anyone vaguely offbeat who might bring a little—*ahem*—color to the proceedings." These include a man who specializes in biting the heads off live chickens, and a woman who, for a price somewhere within knocking distance of $100,000, offers to decapitate herself with a chainsaw. Not for nothing does the party become known as Saturday Night in Sodom. As they enter the hotel, guests are greeted by a troupe of hermaphrodite dwarves serving cocaine from trays strapped to their heads; the coke has been specially imported from Bolivia and quality-checked by Mercury.

Freddie Mercury's first group, the Hectics, circa 1958–1962. Mercury is in the middle.

Fortified by "lines of marching powder as long and as thick as your grandmother's arm," the guests are free to choose from a menu of exotic diversions. The hotel ballrooms, made up to resemble labyrinthine jungle swamps, are swarming with magicians, Zulu tribesmen, contortionists, fire-eaters, drag queens and transsexual strippers. Drinks are served by naked waiters and waitresses who politely request that tips are placed not on trays but in bodily crevices. Naked dancers cavort in bamboo cages suspended from ballroom ceilings. Nude models of both sexes wrestle in huge baths of shimmering, uncooked liver, while 300-pound Samoan women lounge on banquet tables, smoking cigarettes from various orifices. As a bonus, visitors to

MERCURY/PHOENIX TRUST/CAMERAPRESS/RETNA

Brian May, 1977

the hotel's grand marble bathrooms are orally serviced by prostitutes of both sexes. "Most hotels offer their guests room service," quips a passing Mercury. "This one offers them lip service."

HEDONISM on such an industrial scale could not last and soon enough extracted its inevitable price.

By 1987, Mercury was too ill to tour, and when he died of complications from AIDS in November 1991, it seemed that Queen had expired with him. Four years later came *Made in Heaven*, a posthumous album containing the material Mercury was working on with Brian May, Roger Taylor and John Deacon at the time of his death. And yet, a decade and a half after the singer's death, the mighty Queen are back, fronted by former Free/Bad Company singer Paul Rodgers, who was once alarmingly nominated by Tony Blair as his favorite rock vocalist.

Now, Queen were never cool. They were way too over the top for that. But their reformation comes at a time when their critical stock has never been higher, with bands such as the Darkness and Scissor Sisters owing them a debt and everyone from Foo Fighters to the Killers singing their praises. Demand for tickets to their first tour in almost 20 years is bound to be enormous, but the recruitment of Rodgers is also certain to prove controversial. The recent reformation of the Doors under similar circumstances, with the Cult's Ian Astbury filling the shoes of Jim Morrison, has divided fans down the middle.

But then Queen never cared much for reputation. From their formation in 1970, Queen pushed the boundaries musically, visually and commercially. According to Roger Taylor, "It was Freddie who instilled in us the belief that we had to make people gasp every time." Yet the gasps were initially muted, and Queen struggled to make an impact on an early Seventies British rock scene dominated on the one hand by David Bowie's androgynous alien and Marc Bolan's bopping, pouting glitter-pixie and, on the other, by the cosmic pretensions of Yes, Emerson, Lake and Palmer and the prog-rock contingent. Somewhere in between was the art rock of Roxy Music and the witty pop pastiches of 10cc and Sparks, whom Queen found themselves supporting at an early gig at the Marquee.

It was hard to see quite where Queen's bombastic combination of camp theatricality and heavy rock fit in. Even by the standards of the times, they were outsiders. Brian May, the poodle-permed astronomer who'd joined the band while writing a PhD on "Motions of Interplanetary Dust," fashioned guitars out of old fireplaces and quaintly employed a sixpenny coin as a plectrum. Dentist-turned-drummer Roger Taylor had the look of a dissolute Thirties-era Hollywood lothario, and bassist John Deacon was a former science student whose look was anonymous to the point that he was virtually invisible.

Then there was Freddie Mercury. Born Farrokh Bulsara in 1946 to Persian parents in Zanzibar, Mercury had arrived in the suburbs of Bohemian London in 1963 with the vague notion of pursuing a career in graphic design or fashion. Having enrolled at Ealing College (whose previous alumni include Pete Townshend and Ron Wood), he drifted into music, fronting a series of uncelebrated bands that included Wreckage and Ibex.

He also developed a flair for sartorial bravura. Friends of the time recall him walking along London's Portobello Road dressed as a pirate, or decked out in leather and feather boas. His flamboyance was matched by an ambition that one associate described as "full of volcanic, pent-up urgency." Long before Queen fell into place, Mercury's self-belief bordered on the fanatical. "I'm not going to be a star," he'd announce to anyone who'd care to listen. "I'm going to be a legend."

CRUCIAL TO THE evolution of that legend and Queen's unique sound—built around a studio confection of monumental slabs of multitracked guitars and huge, operatic choruses of layered vocals—was producer Roy Thomas Baker. He'd cut his teeth working with hard rock acts such as Nazareth and Hawkwind, and, despite Queen's propensity for sonic operatics, was determined the band shouldn't use synthesizers but rely instead on May's guitar to provide whatever special effects were required.

It would take Queen three entire years to complete their 1973 debut album; much of the time was spent experimenting in London's Trident studios, though they also toured the provinces. Press reaction to the early shows was mixed, partly because Queen resisted neat categorization. Due to Mercury's stage garb (flared satin pants, tight leotards, diamanté codpieces, ballet pumps, mascara, nail lacquer) they found themselves lumped in with the glam movement. At the same time, May's baroque signature riffs earned comparison with Deep Purple and Uriah Heep, while the portentous subject matter of their early songs ("My Fairy King," "Seven Seas of Rhye," "Ogre Battle") saw them likened to prog-rockers. In one of the group's earliest critiques, a *Melody Maker* writer decided: "Queen are either the future of rock and roll or a bunch of raving pooftahs trying to jump on the Bowie bandwagon while doing a poor piss-take of Black Sabbath."

"We quite like to confuse people," said Mercury in one of his first interviews. "We're not really like anyone else. If anything, we have more in common with Liza Minnelli than Led Zeppelin. We're more in the showbiz tradition than the rock and roll tradition." The truth of this statement was soon proven when famed British designer Zandra Rhodes was hired to design stage costumes for the band.

Yet, Queen's debut album got little airplay, despite including live favorites such as "Liar" and "Keep Yourself Alive," and sales were poor. A slice of luck turned the tide in early 1974: when a promo film of David Bowie's "Rebel Rebel," due to be shown on *Top of the Pops*, became unavailable at the last moment. Queen were swiftly recruited to fill the vacant slot, and their performance of "Seven Seas of Rhye" changed their profile overnight. The single made the U.K. Top 10 and helped catapult the album *Queen II* to the Number Five position.

Yet, as Mercury would later concede, it wasn't until their third album, *Sheer Heart Attack*, released at the end of 1974, that Queen found their feet, providing international recognition and their debut U.K. Top Five single,"Killer Queen." "We've found our identity now," he said. "And we have the feeling we can outdo anyone. We've always been striving to be the biggest and the best. Now we're in touching distance of that."

Queen, 1973

PETER MAZEL/LFI

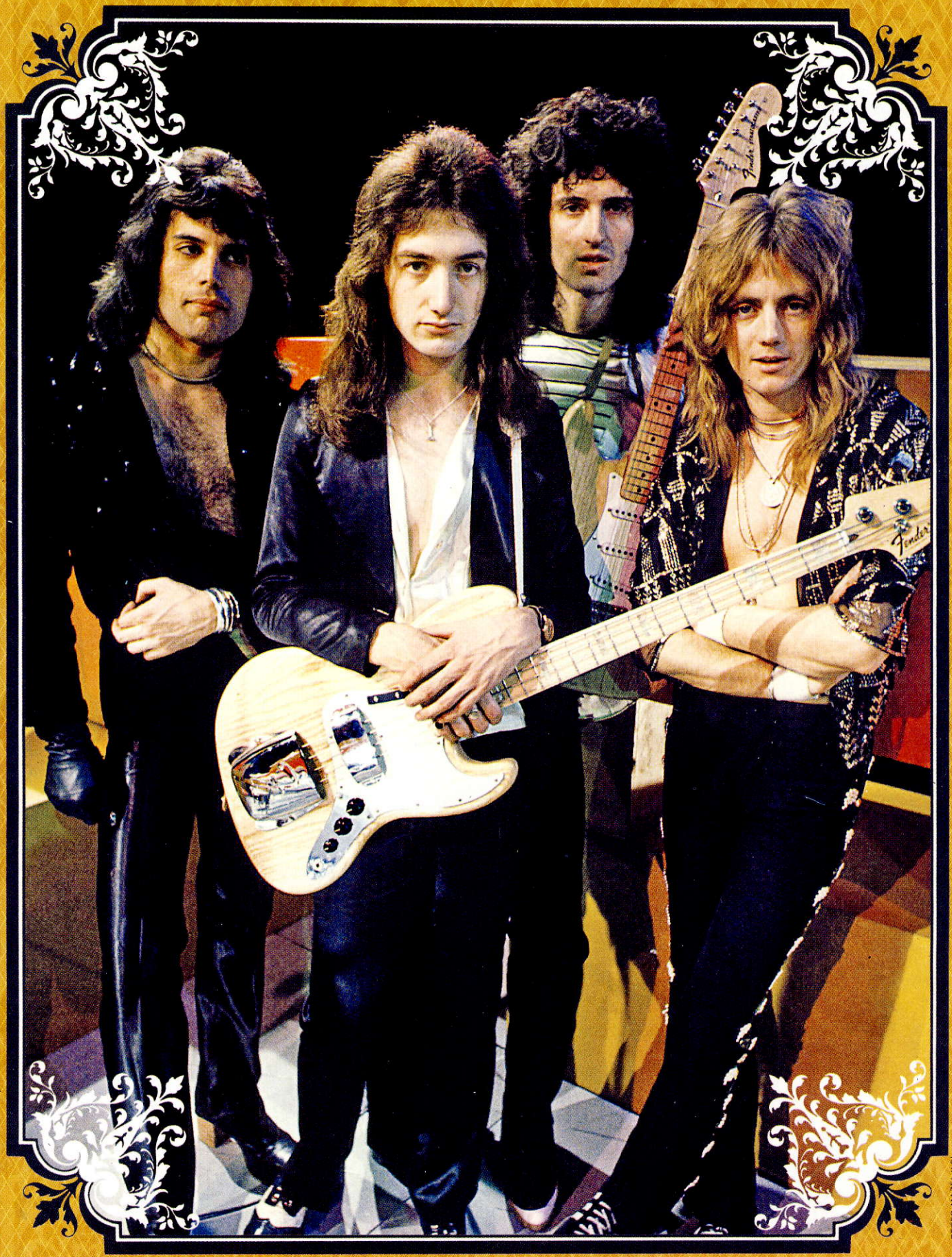
"WE'RE REALLY NOT LIKE ANYONE ELSE. IF ANYTHING, WE HAVE MORE IN COMMON WITH LIZA MINELLI THAN LED ZEPPELIN."
—FREDDIE MERCURY

THE FOLLOWING year they went widescreen. Encouraged by the advances made by 10cc on their own tripartite pop operetta "Une Nuit a Paris" (from the Manchester band's groundbreaking May 1975 album, *The Original Soundtrack*), Queen created "Bohemian Rhapsody," the standout track on *A Night at the Opera*, released in the U.S. in December 1975. The track took the basic elements of Queen—camp grandeur, strutting self-assurance, multilayered ostentation—and distended them into a nearly six-minute-long rock operetta that divided listeners more than any record before or since.

From this point on Queen became

JOE BANGAY/LFI

Mercury and May onstage in Sydney, Australia, 1985



PETER MAZEL/LFI

Queen with their Gold record for "Bohemian Rhapsody," in Amsterdam, 1977

impossible to ignore. Everything about them—the anthems, the videos, the stadium tours, the rock-star lifestyles—would be consummated on a scale devoted to pushing the needle into the red. Understatement was anathema. Overstatement was their métier.

After "Bohemian Rhapsody," Queen so finely tuned their sense of self-mockery that they were almost immune to censure. Mercury, in particular, managed to hone his personal style so it embraced both absolute conviction and a heightened sense of his own absurdity. This enabled him to turn a negative criticism to his own advantage. If the band were accused of shallowness, he'd say: "Of course, dear. We're wonderfully shallow. Our songs are like Bic razors: designed for mass consumption and instantly disposable." Faced with the charge that Queen were pompous and preposterous, he'd gleefully accept the epithets as compliments: "All true, darling. We're the most preposterous band that's ever lived."

He was no less playful when deflecting questions about his sexuality. In 1975, he came close to being outed when a U.S. journalist who turned up to interview him in Ohio was shown into his hotel room 30 minutes early to find him reclining on a pile of cushions, waited on by a group of scantily clad, muscular young hunks. "These are my servants, dear," he bluffed. Even on the occasions when he did encourage the rumors surrounding his sexual orientation, it went largely unnoticed. As in 1976 when, asked point-blank whether he was straight, bisexual or gay, he replied, "I sleep with men, women, cats, you name it."

The truth was that, by the mid Seventies, Mercury was as confused as anyone about his sexuality. Though he'd been experimenting with men since the age of 14, he'd been in a long-term relationship with boutique owner Mary Austin since the late Sixties. According to his long-standing personal assistant, Peter Freestone, the seemingly incomprehensible lyrics of "Bohemian Rhapsody" are a thinly disguised attempt to resolve his personal situation at the time: still living with Austin, he had a regular boyfriend in music publisher David Minns, and an escalating interest in casual gay pickups.

AFTER THE MAMMOTH success of "Bohemian Rhapsody," the hits came thick and fast. *A Night at the Opera* stayed in the U.K. charts for more than a year. The following year's *A Day at the Races* (both it and its predecessor took their names from movies of the Marx Brothers comedy team) went over huge in Japan, and in Britain all four Queen albums simultaneously took up residency in the charts.

Love Queen or loathe them, *A Night at the Opera* and *A Day at the Races* were masterpieces of their kind. Nobody before or since has done pomp and bombast with more exuberance and joie de vivre. This was indeed rock and roll as choreographed by Cecil B. DeMille. The former was at the time the most expensive rock album ever made. Recorded and mixed in six different studios, it stretched the technology of the time to its limits. "Bohemian Rhapsody" itself took three weeks to record, and there were more vocal overdubs than it was possible to fit on the tape at certain points. *A Day at the Races* was the first album to be produced by the band, but the absence of Roy Thomas Baker is hardly discernible, so fully had Mercury and May in particular absorbed the technique Baker himself described as "kitchen-sink overproduction."

The double-A single "We Will Rock You"/"We Are the Champions," from their 1977 album, *News of the World*, spent six months on the U.S. chart and gave them their first Top Five hit. In the U.S., they became superstars. "As soon as we made it," Mercury said, "we knew there were no longer any limits on what we could do."

By now, of course, punk had exploded all over the face of popular music. It made little difference to Queen's popularity but it did appear to persuade them to tone down some of their more grandiose tendencies. *News of the World* boasted shorter songs and a more straightforward rock direction. But the band's main contribution to punk was unwittingly to facilitate a now-legendary debacle between the Sex Pistols and Bill Grundy, host of the British TV news program *Today*. Queen were originally scheduled to appear on the program but pulled out at the last minute. Left with a slot to fill at short notice, EMI nominated Queen's newest label mates to take their place—and they did, cursing with a prodigiousness equal to Queen's hedonism.

LED ZEPPELIN SET THE BENCHMARK FOR ROCK AND ROLL TOURING EXCESS. BUT QUEEN TOOK IT UP A NUMBER OF NOTCHES.

PETER MAZEL/LFI

Photo session for *Queen II*, London, 1974

Meanwhile, Queen embraced success and excess. In 1979, to mark Mercury's birthday, more than 100 friends were flown on the Concorde for a party in a New York City hotel. "Don't worry about the costs, dears," he said. "The only thing you'll have to pay for are the condoms." Supplemented by regulars from the area's gay clubs, along with an assortment of deviants, there ensued a five-day orgy. Highlights included a trio of auto-fellating transsexuals and a group of ladies who performed a variety of sexual acts with snakes.

Nothing compared to the rampant hedonism that was life on the road for Queen. "Led Zeppelin set the benchmark for rock and roll touring excess," confides a former road manager. "But Queen took it up a number of notches. Their excess was organized like a military maneuver. The drugs were flown in to whatever city they were playing. If the coke didn't arrive on time, the show would be delayed. The sex was always on a plate. Half the fun of touring with any band is sitting down at breakfast the morning after a show and hearing what the musicians had got up to the previous night. Roger Taylor had the reputation of being a complete rock slut. Every morning there'd be a story going round about him that would make you drop your knife and fork. Then someone would stroll in and spill the beans on what Freddie had got up to, and that would make you fall off your chair. Around '78–'79, when Queen became huge, Freddie's appetites soared. He was nonstop sex and drugs. Before a show, after a show...even between songs. Before an encore, he'd nip backstage, have a few lines of coke, get a quick blowjob from some bloke he'd just met, then run back to the stage and finish the gig. The man had stamina."

In autumn 1980 came "Crazy Little Thing Called Love" (reputedly written by Mercury in his bath at the Berlin Hilton) and "Another One Bites the Dust" from the album *The Game*, which gave Queen their first U.S. Number One hits. Mercury settled in New York, purchasing a luxury apartment overlooking Central Park. AIDS had yet to cast its terrible shadow and the city's gay community was enjoying a golden age of promiscuity. As Mercury put it: "New York is Sin City, and here I am free to slut myself to the hilt. I get up in the morning, scratch my head and wonder who I'm going to fuck next."

In his 1998 memoir *Freddie Mercury*, Peter Freestone described Mercury's average day between 1980 and 1982. He'd rise around 4 P.M. and rid his apartment of the previous night's conquests—often as many as six. After breakfast, he'd hand a shopping list to Freestone, who would head off to the drug dealer.

Around 8 P.M., a limo would pick up Mercury and his entourage and drop them at a club, where they'd join hundreds of others in a nonstop fuck-a-thon.

According to Elton John, Freddie partied harder than anyone he ever met. "We'd be up for nights," John recalls, "sitting there at 11 in the morning, still flying high. Queen were supposed to be catching a plane, and Freddie would be like, 'Oh fuck! Another line, dear?' His appetites were unquenchable. He could out-party me, which is saying something."

AT THE START of the Eighties, Queen looked invincible. Their popularity had not only survived the punk storm but grown exponentially.

When punk first hit, Paul Rodgers, the man who's been chosen to front Queen in 2005, was singing with Bad Company, who'd enjoyed worldwide hits with "Can't Get Enough" and "Feel Like Makin' Love." "When the Pistols and the Clash came along, bands like Bad Company became dinosaurs overnight," Rodgers explains. "Suddenly, nobody wanted to know us, whereas Queen just got bigger and bigger. They seemed to ride over punk, regardless, just as they rode over other musical fashions. They were just so well defined. They were a law unto themselves. Nothing could touch them."

"Another One Bites the Dust" confirmed their status as America's favorite band, selling 4.5 million copies. In the U.K., "Under Pressure" (featuring David Bowie) was their best seller to date, and their 1981 *Greatest Hits* entered at the Number One spot, staying in the charts for 312 weeks. They also cracked South America, their 1981 tour culminating in a gig at São Paulo's Morumbi Stadium for 131,000 fans.

But with the new decade, tastes were changing, and there were signs that Queen were losing momentum. Yes, they rode out the punk years, but whether they could survive in the postpunk era of new romanticism, white funk and the new electronic pop being made by Sheffield bands like ABC and the Human League was another matter.

MICK ROCK/STAR FILE

Their 1980 *Flash Gordon* soundtrack and 1982's ill-conceived, dance-oriented *Hot Space* were conspicuous flops. American sales dipped alarmingly once Mercury dropped his trademark "flash and glitter" image and adopted a gay clone look of short-cropped hair, "flavor-savor" moustache, PVC trousers and leather-and-chain cap. Behind the scenes, Queen's unrelenting regime was taking its toll. There was growing infighting, including a mass backstage brawl at a 1984 Italian festival, as the group's vastly contrasting personalities began to clash under the phenomenal weight of their success. In contrast to Mercury's flamboyance, Brian May fretted and fussed, and suffered from long bouts of manic depression. Roger Taylor seemed hell-bent on outgrossing Freddie in the rock-slut stakes, while John Deacon played the stoic bass player to perfection, just as John Paul Jones did in Led Zeppelin. The psychological complexities of the relationship between the four of them would have required an army of analysts to resolve and at times threatened to tear them apart.

Both Taylor and May embarked on solo projects, while Mercury occupied himself with a series of extracurricular ventures, including a songwriting stint with Michael Jackson (abruptly terminated when Jackson wandered into the studio lounge to find Mercury snorting coke through a $100 bill). As May explains, it was make-or-break time for Queen. "The excess leaked out from the music into life and became a need," he says. "As a band, we were always trying to get to a place that had never been reached before, and excess is a part of that. It was all like a fantasy to see how far we could go. And that started to take its toll. We were all out of control. We'd gone to a place that was difficult to recover from."

Recover they did, storming back in 1984 with "Radio Gaga" and "I Want to Break Free." Yet, it was hard to shake the suspicion that Queen had reached the summit of their potential. Then came their thoughtless eight-show visit to Sun City in South Africa in the autumn of '84. Apartheid was at the height of its obnoxious design, and Sun City was the regime's most notorious whites-only entertainment complex in the so-called "homeland" of Bophuthatswana. The British Musicians' Union had imposed a boycott on South Africa as far back as 1961. The Beatles and the Stones had refused to play there, and most bands with any social conscience or even with a less-altruistic concern for their own reputation had likewise declined to play to South Africa's racially segregated audiences. Queen waded straight in, earning a place on the United Nation's cultural blacklist as a result, as well as the opprobrium of rock's right-on community, which had never liked Queen's brashness anyway.

The backlash eventually forced them to promise never to go back, and May and Taylor's support today for Nelson Mandela's anti-AIDS charity 46664 (named after his Robben Island prison number) can be seen as part of an ongoing determination to make amends. That they managed to ride the Sun City storm was probably down to a single, fateful phone call from Bob Geldof.

IT WAS DAVID BOWIE who, in 1976, posited the view that "Adolf Hitler was the first rock star." It's tempting to dismiss this as the facile ravings of a coked-up rock star, but Bowie was touching on an inescapable truth. Live rock and roll has always had something of the totalitarian about it. Queen exemplified this better than any other group of their era. Critics hated them for it: after the Sun City debacle, British music publication *NME* castigated the band's "I Want to Break Free" and "Radio Gaga" videos for their "vile, pseudo-fascist imagery" and accused Queen of evoking the atmosphere of a Nuremberg rally. But just when it seemed Queen had used themselves up, the Geldof-organized Live Aid offered them a chance to test just how far they could extend themselves in front of a TV audience of nearly two billion. Their response to charges of stadium bombast and epic folly was to up the ante as they stormed their way through a bravura set that included "Bohemian Rhapsody," "Radio Gaga," "Hammer to Fall," "Crazy Little Thing Called Love," "We Will Rock You" and "We Are the Champions."

As Geldof tells it: "Live Aid gave Freddie Mercury the chance of poncing about in front of the world. They were absolutely the best band on that day. It was the perfect stage for them, and they seemed to instinctively know that. It was as if they were the only act who grasped the fact that this was a global jukebox and they had to be the biggest and the loudest if people were going to sit up and take notice."

The whole of Queen's career had been leading up to their show-stealing 20-minute set on July 13, 1985—and everything led away from it. Having pummeled the planet into submission by the supercharged verve of their performance that day, maybe there was nothing left to prove. Post-1985, there would be huge Queen tours, including the following year's *Kind of Magic* extravaganza, which Roger Taylor described as "the sort of thing that makes *Ben Hur* look like the Muppets" and which saw Mercury take the stage in an ermine-lined cloak and jeweled crown. There would also be global hits like "I Want It All" and "Innuendo." Even so, everything Queen did after Live Aid couldn't help but look and sound like an anticlimax.

Meanwhile, that terrible shadow was closing in. By 1987, the AIDS virus had been common knowledge for at least four years, though Mercury had steadfastly refused to compromise his hedonistic lifestyle. It was an attitude he would be forced to revise in early '87 when two of his close friends died of AIDS. Then, around Easter of that year, he tested positive himself, at first choosing to share the dreadful news only with his boyfriend, Jim Hutton.

MERCURY'S FINAL YEARS were a somber, muted contrast to the tumult that had defined his previous decade.

As his illness worsened, he was reluctant to leave the Kensington home he shared with Hutton, venturing out only for work. Despite fierce media speculation, an official announcement of his condition was delayed until the night before his death on November 22, 1991. "Freddie didn't want to be looked at as an object of pity and curiosity," explains Roger Taylor, "and he didn't want circling vultures over his head. We thought we'd announce that he had AIDS late in the day, when it was too late to really bother him."

Mercury was never less than brutally honest whenever he was asked about the prospects of Queen's music standing the test of time: "I don't give a fuck, dear. I won't be around to worry about it." If anything, in the decade following his death, Queen were even more omnipresent. Throughout the Nineties, their music was repackaged with such regularity there was rarely a time when they were absent from the charts. More recently, the music *We Will Rock You* musical, written by Ben Elton and coproduced by Robert De Niro, has been a runaway success across three continents.

In the years since Mercury's death, rumors of Queen reforming have been persistent. As Elton John once said: "For May, Taylor and Deacon it must be like keeping a fabulous Ferrari in the garage and not being able to drive." In 2002, May appeared to have finally put the matter to rest when he remarked, "How can you replace the irreplaceable?" And so, news of Queen's reformation this year has been greeted with stunned disbelief. If ever a band was defined by its singer, it's Queen.

But Paul Rodgers is unrepentant. "In case you're wondering, it ain't the money," he says. "The original guys from Queen certainly don't need the money. And neither do I. We're doing this because there is a creative spark there. It's about the music. It's always about the music." What would Queen's new singer say to Queen's old singer if he had the chance? "I'd say, 'I hope we rock you, Freddie.' If he's up there looking down on us, I hope he's smiling." ■

NEWS OF THE

Guitarist Brian May chats about Queen's new life with ex-Bad Company vocalist Paul Rodgers.

by JON WILDE

GUITAR WORLD How would you describe the reaction to the news that Queen are going to be touring again?

BRIAN MAY I think most people have been stunned by the news. When I stop to think about it, I'm stunned. It is strange to me. As the tour approaches, it feels like my whole body and soul have been tipped upside down. Nineteen eighty-six was the last time we went out under the banner of Queen. I've toured on my own since then, but it's now dawning on me that this huge ball is about to roll again. It's slightly more exciting than scary, though.

GW Why Paul Rodgers?

MAY For years, I couldn't see the point of doing Queen again. I couldn't visualize it. Then we performed some songs with Paul and it was like a door opened in my mind. It suddenly occurred to me that we could do something that will give people a little bit of what they want but will also take it to a new place. I'm starting to wonder why we didn't think of it before.

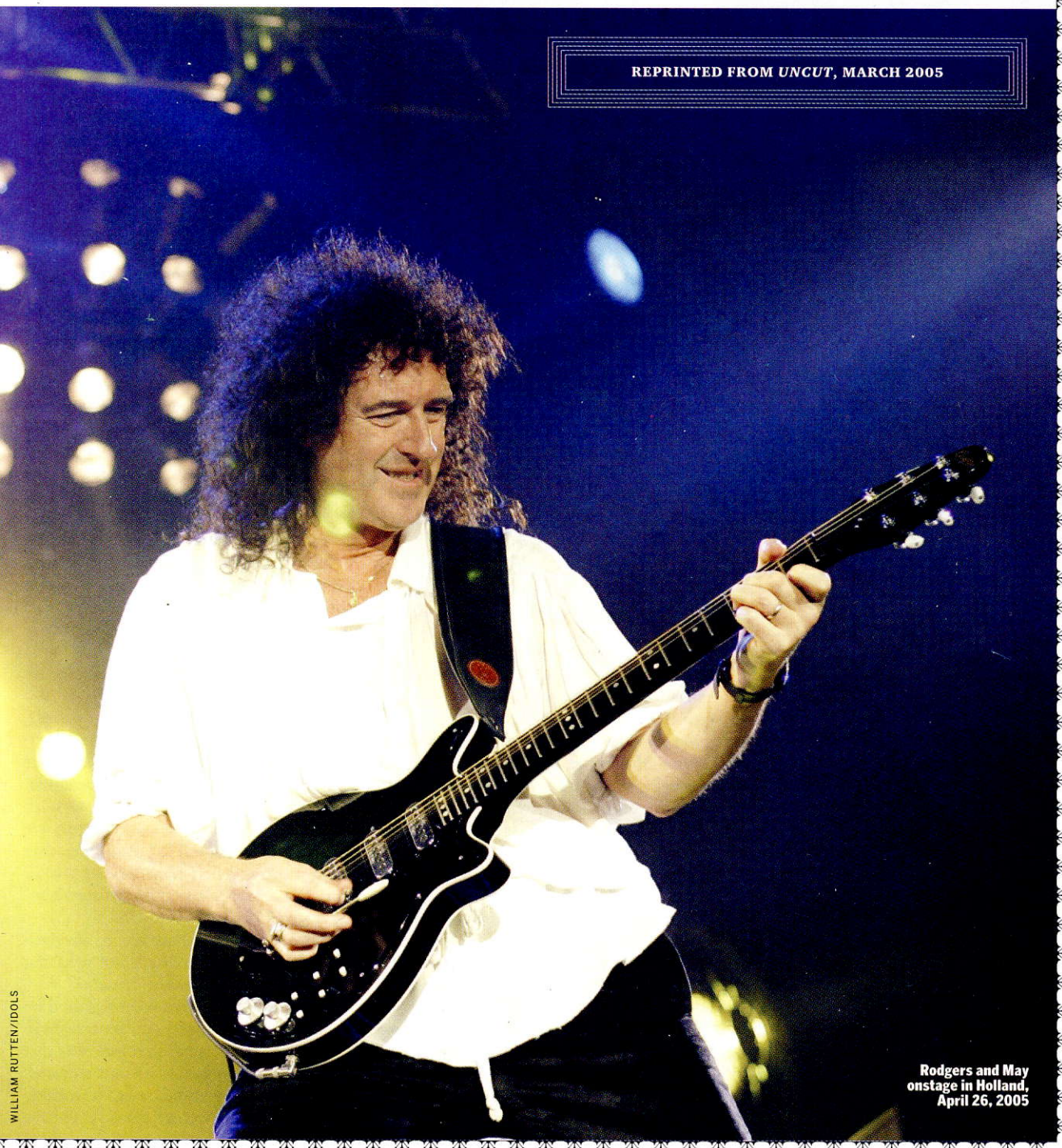
GW Do you expect to be shot down in flames?

MAY Of course. Almost my entire life has been lived amid a hail of bullets. As far as I'm concerned, the decision to tour with Paul is nobody's business but ours. If you think you're gonna hate it, don't come.

GW When Queen first started, do you remember

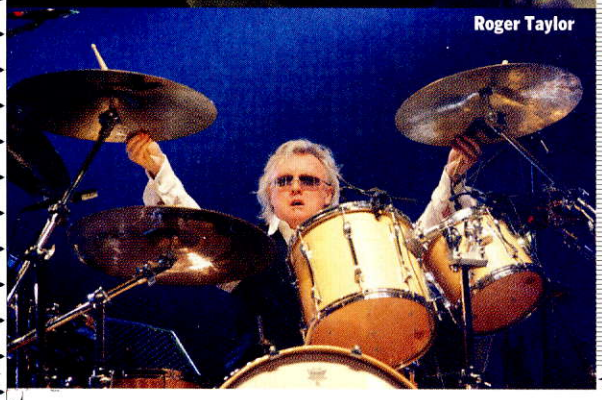
WORLD

REPRINTED FROM *UNCUT*, MARCH 2005



WILLIAM RUTTEN/IDOLS

Rodgers and May onstage in Holland, April 26, 2005



Roger Taylor

"As far as I'm concerned, the decision to tour with Paul is nobody's business but ours. If you think you're gonna hate it, don't come."
—Brian May

making a conscious decision that everything had to be big, big, big?

MAY We knew we wanted to maximize what we were doing. We wanted to be the fulfillment of the kind of band we wanted to see onstage. We'd look at bands like the Who and the Beatles, see how exciting they were, and realize that we wanted to produce that level of excitement and create that kind of vision into the beyond. That was there from the beginning, but we had time to design ourselves as something that suited us. Our aim was to be ready when the opportunity came along and to have something that was unique and special. We always had that arrogance about us.

GW Would you agree with Freddie that Queen had more in common with Liza Minnelli than Led Zep?

MAY We were a mix of both those things. We embraced the value of bands like Free. They were a huge influence on us. But the way we presented ourselves was very different. I'm not sure it was necessarily a show-biz thing. But we did use every device possible to make an audience go "wow!" We used costumes, lights...every dramatic effect we could think of. We wanted to provide complete entertainment. We wanted people to feel wrung out by the time a Queen show was finished. We felt the need to blind the audience and stun them to the point where they could take no more. At the same time, it had to feel like a celebration.

GW Did "Bohemian Rhapsody" change everything?

MAY Quite honestly, it wasn't that big a deal to us. It was a pivotal moment for us, but it was one of many, many pivotal moments. With each album came new territory, a new way of thinking. We needed every album to be groundbreaking for us. When we sat down to start work on an album, the first thing we'd do was pull everything apart. Then we'd put it all back together in a new way. "Bohemian Rhapsody" was just one of the things that came out of that approach.

GW When you hear "Bohemian Rhapsody" has yet again been voted Best Single of All Time, aren't you tempted to say, "Actually, there's loads of better songs than that"?

MAY Quite honestly, I don't think there are any better songs. I certainly can't think of any. Even the Stones...I don't think they did anything to match it. Having said that, I'd agree that the Who were a better band than Queen.

GW Do you have any idea what "Bohemian Rhapsody" is about?

MAY I think I know what Freddie was trying to say in his lyrics, but everyone seems to have their own take on it. For me, that's the beauty of it. It's not that I'm trying to preserve the mystery; the mystery will preserve itself no matter what I say. It was Freddie's baby. He never explained it, and I think he was right not to do so.

GW Freddie once said that all Queen songs are meaningless except for some of yours.

MAY Well, Freddie did have a lovely way of dismissing everything. He'd say that Queen were completely disposable, but I'm not sure he meant it. As far as our songs go, I don't think they were enigmatic or meaningless. Queen were never enigmatic. We were always totally upfront about everything. As for being meaningless, I'm not sure that songs need to have a meaning. They're not like a piece of prose. The best songs speak directly to the emotions, and I'm not sure it's important what they're supposed to mean.

GW Did people miss the humor in Queen?

MAY It was missed by some people, especially the press, who seemed hell-bent on having a dig at us. That still goes on. I wasn't the least bit surprised that, before we'd played a single note with Paul Rodgers, people were telling us we shouldn't be doing it. I suppose Queen are the sort of band that people either love or hate. Nobody ever says, "Queen are okay." Maybe that's a good thing.

GW Why do you think Queen survived punk when so many other bands were put to the sword and never recovered?

MAY I don't think we were bothered by fashions, and punk seemed like a fashion to me. One of our great strengths was that we thought of ourselves as international. Even if punk had made us unfashionable for six months in England, it wouldn't have

WILLIAM RUTTEN/IDOLS

mattered because we had the rest of the world. So we never felt threatened by it. If anything, it had a small influence on us in that, after experimenting with very complex arrangements on *A Night at the Opera* and *A Day at the Races*, we went back to a rootsier thing with *News of the World*.

GW It has to be said: Queen knew how to throw a party.

MAY We did like a party, yes. As for what went on at those parties, our standard line is that a lot of excessive things might have gone on, but we didn't see them. The thing about Queen is that we knew when to work and when to play. Life on the road was pretty full on. To be what we were, we had to live it to the full. We could never have been a weekend rock and roll band. It had to be a full-time thing. And, yes, I'd go along with the theory that we were organized in our excess.

GW Did things get out of control in the early Eighties?

MAY We moved out to Munich to isolate ourselves from normal life so we could focus on the music, and we all ended up in a place that was rather unhealthy. A difficult period. We weren't getting along together. We all had different agendas. It was a difficult time for me personally. Some dark moments. But it was only after Queen that things properly caved in for me. But I don't want to get into that...

GW "We Will Rock You" was one of your compositions. What was the thinking behind it?

MAY "We Will Rock You" came to me in the middle of the night. I just wanted to write a song that the audience could participate in, but the lyrics are about the ages of man and the ultimate futility of violence.

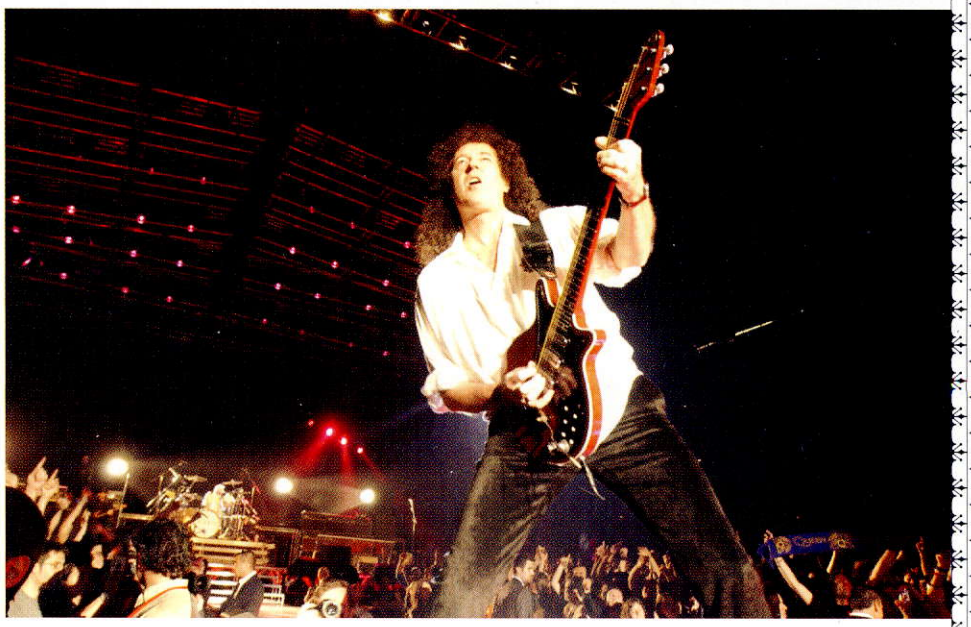
GW Do you ever hear one of Queen's songs on the radio and think, Bloody hell, there's no escape?

MAY Honestly, no. You never get fed up hearing one of your own songs on the radio. It's always a thrill. Occasionally, it would be nice to step out of being me for a while. Not that there's anyone else I'd rather be. But there are times when I'd rather not be Brian May the rock star. That would be very refreshing.

GW In the buildup to Live Aid, were you aware of how important the event was going to be for Queen?

MAY Basically, I took Bob Geldof at his word. He said to me: "You're the biggest band in the world. We need you on the bill because we need to sell this thing worldwide. It's a global jukebox, so just go out there and play the fuckin' hits." So all we did was go out there and give people what they wanted to hear. Compared to most of the other acts, we had the advantage because we were used to playing football stadiums all around the world.

GW Would you agree that, after Live Aid, the rest of Queen's career was an anticlimax?



MAY Not really. I mean, a year after Live Aid, we filled Wembley Stadium on our own as part of the biggest tour of our lives. Then we finished off with a night at Knebworth that set the attendance record. We had our finales after Live Aid, and looking back, I'm just glad we quit when we were at the top.

GW Any regrets about dressing up as a penguin for the "I'm Going Slightly Mad" video or as a housewife for "I Want to Break Free"?

MAY Absolutely not. My attitude was always, Let's give it a go. We weren't afraid to go down any road. The idea for putting us in drag for "I Want to Break Free" came from Roger's girlfriend. I thought it was a fantastic idea, even though it caused us inestimable damage in America. A lot of places around the world just couldn't handle Queen in drag. The penguin costume—that was a different kind of fantasy. But it was all fun to me.

GW How difficult was it to make your final recordings when Freddie's health was deteriorating?

MAY For all of us, the studio was always a great escape from the worries and the cares of real life, because you go in and you're completely immersed in the music. Freddie was always a joy in the studio. Always full of ideas. That continued right to the end. For him, it was a great lifeline. So those last recordings weren't trying. Quite the opposite.

GW Through the Nineties up to the present, how difficult was it to live in the shadow of Queen?

MAY Queen was such an amazingly charged environment. When it all stopped, that became impossible for me. Looking back, I was grieving, for Freddie, mainly, but also for the end of the band and the end of my marriage. I'd be doing my solo things, but there was no getting away from Queen. I worked very hard at running away from it. Then I realized that running was futile. Why should I have to fight the very thing I worked so hard to build up all those years? Why can't I be proud of it? So I stopped running. Then I got to this point where I could see the sense of going out on the road with Queen again.

GW This forthcoming tour—will it be any good?

MAY It won't be the same as it used to be, that's for sure. It has to be different, and it's the fact of being something different that's part of the reason for me doing it. If I thought it was going to be like a Queen tribute band, I wouldn't be bothering. I have a good feeling in my water that this is the right time for it to happen and that it's meant to be. Will it be any good? I think it's going to be bloody marvelous. ■

BRAD GREGORY/COURTESY QUEEN TOURING LTD.

THE RETURN OF QUEEN

Queen's Brian May joins forces with Bad Company's Paul Rodgers for what promises to be more than just a night at the opera.

THE BUZZ was all over the internet the week before Christmas 2004: guitarist Brian May and drummer Roger Taylor were taking Queen back on the road with former Free and Bad Company vocalist Paul Rodgers.

Web surfers chuckled at the thought of the gravel-voiced singer tackling the soaring melodies of Queen's catalog. But on January 21, their snickering became gasps of surprise when the merger was officially announced at a press conference in London: Rodgers would join May and Taylor for what would be, in effect, Queen's first world tour in 20 years and first U.S. tour since the *Hot Space* album in 1982. At least half those in attendance wore looks of astonishment: Paul Rodgers? In Queen? You have to be kidding.

Actually, no. It transpired the tour was to be billed as "Queen + Paul Rodgers," an important delineation where Queen are concerned. When the group's lead singer, Freddie Mercury, died from AIDS-related causes in November 1991, Queen were, essentially, finished. Though still an active, though nonvisible member behind the scenes of what May calls "the Queen cottage industry," bassist John Deacon has since retired from performing with the band. And while May and Taylor have regrouped several times under the Queen moniker, they have resisted permanently filling the vacancy left by Mercury. Indeed, as May explains, neither he, Taylor nor Rodgers is attempting to do so now. "I never thought I would be doing

BY MICK WALL

WILLIAM RUTTEN/IDOLS

Brian May performing with Queen in Holland, April 26, 2005

REPRINTED FROM *GUITAR WORLD*, MAY 2005

this again," May says. "I was always against the idea of putting someone there to impersonate Freddie in any way. But Paul comes from his own place; he isn't in any sense trying to take the place of Freddie. When I realized that, I knew for sure that we could do this. Nobody's trying to pretend Freddie's still here; this is something new and different."

If some British fans were stunned by news of the Queen/Rodgers merger, it was with good reason. While Queen have been immensely popular in the United States, in the U.K. the group has been elevated to a status reserved for rock and roll royalty. Queen's success in their country ranks second only to the Beatles; their singles and albums have spent a combined 1,725 weeks—a sum totaling more than 33 years—on the charts. Thus, while many fans greeted news of Queen's imminent revival with joy, others, including much of the U.K. press, remained skeptical that a down-and-dirty R&B-style vocalist like Rodgers could fill Mercury's immense and flamboyant shoes.

As it happens, the choice is one even Freddie Mercury might have approved. "Freddie was a great fan of Paul's," says Taylor. "We saw Free loads of times at [*London's*] Marquee Club. So I'm very excited that we're working it all out."

Adds May, "I remember being on tour in America at the time the first Bad Company album came out [*1974*], and it just sounded so good on the radio. It made your whole day."

The idea for the tour was born in London in September 2004 when May performed at the Fender Guitars 50th anniversary concert and invited Rodgers to join him onstage for a blast through Free's 1970 hit "All Right Now." "We were both so knocked out by the sheer chemistry going on between us onstage," says the guitarist. "Afterward, we were talking together when someone—I guess it was me—said, 'Well, you know, maybe we should do more of this sometime.'" Rodgers agreed, noting that all they needed was a drummer. Fortunately, Brian knew of one that might be available.

"After the Fender gig," recalls Taylor, "Brian got on the phone to me and said, 'You really have to look at what we just did.' He sent over a videotape, and I could see what he was talking about. I wondered why we hadn't thought of doing this before."

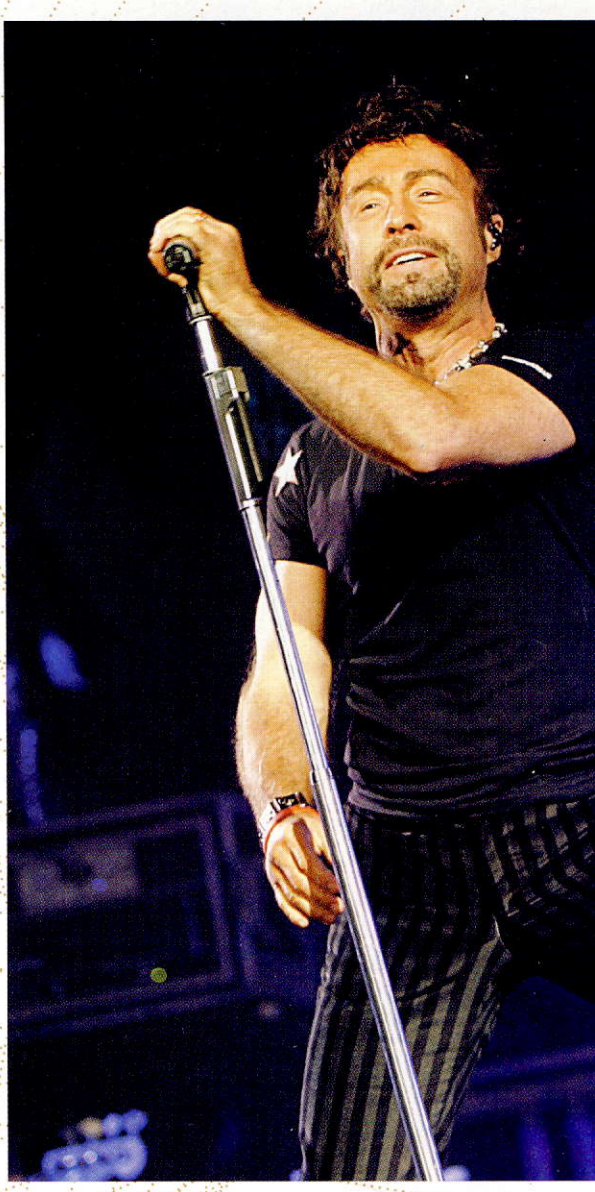
However, the idea only took hold after all three played together in public for the first time a few weeks later, at the televised U.K. Hall of Fame Awards in November. They tore through "We Will Rock You," "We Are the Champions" and the finale, a roof-raising "All Right Now."

"Everything went so amazingly well that night," says May, "and with Roger there, it felt even more right." Rodgers' assessment was even more potent. In a statement, delivered from his home in Canada on the day the tour was announced, he wrote: "POWERFUL and REAL, EXPLOSIVE and DYNAMIC. That's how it felt when Queen and I played together in London… *Let's do more* was the unanimous feeling."

Since then the Queen + Paul Rodgers conglomeration has toured in 14 British and European cities and taken part in Nelson Mandela's 46664 charity concert in South Africa in March. Onstage, Deacon's place has been taken for this tour by former Blue Öyster Cult bassist Danny Miranda, with keyboard player Spike Edney and rhythm guitarist Jamie Moses helping fill out the live sound.

The live set has been skillfully built around classic Queen material interspersed with several of Rodgers' best-known songs from Free and Bad Company. According to May, Rodgers prepared for the tour by "walking around with the headphones on, listening to all the Queen back catalog and singing along," while May and Taylor dug out all of their old Free and Bad Company albums. Listening to Free's "Fire and Water," says May, "I was struck by the purity of it, the sheer force, the soul… I thought, What an opportunity we have here to explore this stuff, to see what we can do with it together, and I know Paul felt the same. Live, Paul is adding things to the Queen songs that I had never contemplated and I'm already playing differently because of what he's singing. And that's what you want, the sort of chemistry you need to stimulate you."

While the tour so far has treated fans to hits from both Queen's and Rodgers' back catalogs—including "We Will Rock You," "We Are the Champions," "All Right Now," "Can't Get Enough of Your Love" and, yes, "Bohemian Rhapsody"—there have been several surprises, as well. For example, May takes the lead vocal on numbers like "39," "Love of My Life" and "I Want It All," and Taylor handles lead vocals on "Radio Ga Ga" (with Rodgers coming in on the chorus), "These Are the Days of Our Lives" and "I'm In Love with My Car." Meanwhile, the audience is left to sing "I Want to Break Free."



In addition, the live performance of "Bohemian Rhapsody" features footage of Mercury recorded live on tour in the U.K. in 1982, with the whole band only coming in on the grandiose finale. But as May admits, "We always did have help onstage with that one."

Of course, Mercury's theatrical onstage persona was a huge part of seeing Queen in

"Paul was a huge influence on Freddie's life. That's an important factor in how we feel about working with him. There is a connection there." —Brian May

Paul Rodgers and May, with drummer Roger Taylor at back

SEBASTIEN RABANY/DALLE/IDOLS

concert. It was a facet of his talent as unique and distinctive as his voice. But May says he was never concerned about Rodgers' ability to satisfy fans' desire for a captivating frontman. "Paul does amazingly well, I think. The first time I heard him sing 'We Will Rock You,' I knew we had something valid and new here. Paul brings things out of that song I never even knew existed before!"

As a result, the lineup is now set to release a clutch of new products in the U.S. this fall, including a live album in CD and special vinyl double-album format, as well as an even lengthier DVD, all entitled *Queen + Paul Rodgers Rock Live*. They are also planning to release a single consisting of "Fat Bottomed Girls" and a medley of "Reaching Out" and "Tie Your Mother Down," the latter of which have been the opening numbers on the band's European festival dates this summer.

May allows that Rodgers' more macho image has meant that the set has leaned more toward the rockier side of Queen's multifaceted catalog, at the expense of their forays into disco, opera and electronica. "It's certainly bluesier," he says. For the guitarist, the compensation comes in "getting my teeth into" Free and Bad Company material, like "All Right Now," "A Little Bit of Love," "Can't Get Enough of Your Love," "Seagull" and "Feel Like Makin' Love," all of which the band have been playing live in Europe this year.

For May, the new lineup presents "so many new possibilities. For example, Freddie never sang 'Can't Get Enough…' on any Queen tour I can recall. And, of course, there were lots of songs in the last few years of his life Freddie was never able to perform live, like 'These Are the Days of Our Lives,' 'I Want It All' and 'The Show Must Go On.' In that respect, this is much more than just a greatest-hits show."

It's worth noting this isn't the first time since Mercury's death that Queen have collaborated with an artist. In 2000, they had a Number One U.K. single when they teamed up with Brit boy band 5ive for a version of "We Will Rock You." A year later they rerecorded "We Are the Champions" with Robbie Williams for the soundtrack to the movie *A Knight's Tale*, and they have performed live over the years with Elton John, George Michael, David Bowie and Axl Rose, to name a few.

None of these artists, however, has achieved full-time status with the band. May reveals that, one evening three years ago, "several bottles of wine were consumed" with Robbie Williams, whose almost note-perfect performance on "We Are the Champions" had persuaded May and Taylor he might be the one to follow Freddie. Nothing came of it, though. "I don't know why exactly," says May, shaking his head. "Sometimes these things just don't work out, though we're all still friends."

While Rodgers is still not officially in Queen, he is the first outside artist to join the group for a full-scale tour. "Working with Paul is a totally different thing," says May. "He's so fired up about the whole thing, it makes me smile."

To those who remain critical of the Queen + Paul Rodgers lineup, May has a little advice. "How about just coming to the show and letting your hair down?" he offers. Life, he says, is too short to be "afraid of what other people say. If we'd paid attention to the critics in the early days, we'd never have got the band off the ground."

Moreover, as he points out, "I have a very good home life now. I can't say I haven't missed touring or being in Queen; of course I have. But I wouldn't be putting myself through this—being away from my family for so long again—if we didn't genuinely love it. We're musicians, and playing music is what we do, even if it's just for one tour—for one last chance to play these songs again before a live audience. It's not rocket science."

Finally, what do they think Freddie would have made of what they're doing now with Paul? Says May, "I have a very good feeling about what he thinks, wherever he is. I really do. Obviously, it's stuff that we ask ourselves every day. Freddie's very much with us; he can't fail to be. I can't possibly go through a day without talking about Freddie or thinking about him, because he's just in our lives. It's very important to us to know that Freddie would feel good about it. Paul was such a huge influence on Freddie's life. That's an important factor in how we feel about [*working with*] Paul. We feel there is a connection there."

As for the forthcoming U.S. dates, as May says: "We want to go out there and enjoy ourselves, and we hope everyone who comes along enjoys it, too." Taylor adds that American fans can expect "the full-on Queen experience. We haven't been able to get the whole show into some of the concert halls we played in Britain and Europe earlier this year. But that shouldn't be a problem in the sorts of places we're talking about doing in the States. Personally, I can't wait. It's been too long since we last played there—over 20 years—and we want to make up for it." ■

REPRINTED FROM *GUITAR WORLD*, OCTOBER 1998

DAVID REDFERN/RETNA

A KIND OF MAGIC

Few bands could rock with the spectacular grandeur of Queen. Songwriter and master guitar orchestrator Brian May looks back at the band's glory years, with an especially fond remembrance of his creative and personal relationship with the late Freddie Mercury.

BY ALAN DI PERNA

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO THIS YEAR, A LONDON quartet by the name of Queen unleashed its self-titled debut album on an unsuspecting early Seventies rock scene. Many people weren't sure what to make of this new band. Its members—singer Freddie Mercury, guitarist Brian May, bassist John Deacon and drummer Roger Taylor—looked like a set of glam pretty-boys, but their music certainly was more ambitious than anything flirty acts like the New York Dolls, Mott the Hoople or Gary Glitter were doing at the time. Were these Queen guys supposed to be prog-rock? Metal? The singer had a thing for operatic grandeur, leavened by heavy doses of campy humor. And the guitar player could somehow make his ax sound like an entire symphony orchestra—an unheard-of feat back in 1973. The rock critic establishment gave Queen the brush, but a coterie of fans knew

they were on to something good.

Guess who was right? By the mid Seventies, Queen had established themselves as a major force in rock music, thanks to brilliant albums like *A Night at the Opera*, *A Day at the Races* and *News of the World*. Today they've attained classic-rock immortality. Masterfully wrought tracks like "Killer Queen," "Bohemian Rhapsody," "We Will Rock You" and "We Are the Champions" have gone into perpetual AOR rotation. Modern rock-guitar icons like Billy Corgan and Metallica's James Hetfield venerate Brian May to the skies, citing him as a prime influence. And Queen's popularity is such that May's lavish, multitracked guitar orchestrations are today among the most instantly recognizable sounds of Seventies rock on the planet.

These days, May leads a peaceful domestic life at Allerton Hill, his stately home out in the English countryside, just 45 minutes south of London by train. The guitarist, who went through a divorce a few years back, has settled in with his current mate, British television actress Anita Dobson (*Eastenders*), sharing with her a spacious house filled with oriental rugs and Vox AC30 amplifiers. May still looks very much as he did during Queen's heyday: his mane of dark hair is youthfully intact, and he's still fond of wearing those Seventies rock star floppy shirts and tight leather pants that well suit his tall, lanky frame.

But Brian isn't one to dwell in the past. He's got a brand-new album, *Another World*, and has written songs for several recent film projects, including the popular British feature *Sliding Doors*. Queen, meanwhile, continue to be very much a part of his current life. In the years since Mercury's AIDS-related death in 1991, there has been a steady stream of Queen tributes, memorials and retrospectives, such as last year's *Queen Rocks* album, a killer compilation of the band's heavier rock tracks.

May in 1974

"I thought *Queen Rocks* would be a nice idea," says May. "To my mind, the balance is slightly off on the greatest-hits albums because it's always the lighter stuff that becomes a hit."

It was May who wrote many of Queen's best hard rock songs, including "Tie Your Mother Down," "Keep Yourself Alive," "Brighton Rock" and "We Will Rock You." His songwriting contributions to the band also include such stylistically diverse tracks as "'39," "All Dead, All Dead" and "Fat Bottomed Girls." His voice, whether he was singing harmonies or taking the occasional lead vocal, was an integral part of the Queen sound, but it is his highly original approach to electric guitar playing that stands as perhaps his most towering achievement.

Relaxing at home on a cloudy English afternoon, May recently took time for an in-depth interview with *Guitar World*, offering a detailed account of how he evolved that amazing guitar sound. He also took the opportunity to offer some candid insights into Queen's inner workings by explaining the band's approach to songwriting and telling how Mercury's embrace of a gay lifestyle in the Eighties affected the band.

GUITAR WORLD All four members of Queen were songwriters. What went into determining whose songs would get recorded?

BRIAN MAY Well, we fought like cats and dogs. That's the truth. There were times when all our ideas would really work together magically well. Or you'd have a great day in the studio where everybody felt they'd contributed. But then there'd be days when everyone was pulling in totally opposite directions, and it would be very painful. Eventually, three people would have to give way for one person to get what he wanted. That happened a lot, to the point where we all felt major frustration. And, oddly enough, Freddie—who everybody thinks was the great prima donna—was very often the person who would find the compromise. He was very good at mediating. I can remember many times when Roger and I would be pulling in absolutely diametrically opposite directions—no chance of either of us budging—and Freddie would find a way through. He'd say, "Well, you can do this and do this and it will all work."

That was one of Freddie's great talents. But while he was good at finding roads in the mist, he would certainly fight for things he believed in. Like "Another One Bites the

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Dust," which was a bit of a departure for Queen. Roger, at the time, certainly felt that it wasn't rock and roll and was quite angry at the way that was going. And Freddie said, "Darling, leave it to me. I believe in this." John had written the song. But it took Freddie's support to make it happen.

GW In today's world, people are somewhat more tolerant of gays. But what was it like early on, with Freddie being gay in the macho world of Seventies rock?

MAY Early on, it didn't exist. Or if it did, we never saw it. And I don't think Freddie was aware of it, either. He was very much with us. In the early days, we used to share rooms, so I would have known! Freddie had some gorgeous girls. So I don't think the subject ever came up. It's odd, isn't it, to think of that? And it was only later on...I couldn't really pin down the exact time, but I remember there was a point where we realized that Freddie was leading a bit of a different social life than us. He'd just go off on his own and say, "See you later."

So gradually, he was venturing off into other areas. He was encouraged by certain people who sort of brought him out, I guess, one of whom was our personal manager at the time. [*pauses*] How far do I want to get into this? He was a pretty over-the-top kind of person, and I think Freddie found himself in places where he wouldn't naturally had got to if that sort of door hadn't been forcibly opened for him. Do you know what I'm saying? I think he would have drifted into finding himself in a more gradual way if it hadn't suddenly exploded in on him. So there was a period in his life when he was seemingly completely blown away by it all. I can remember the Mott the Hoople tour [*April 1974*] was the first time I ever experienced sex on a grand scale, and it was almost really not my decision. It kind of happened to me, you know? I felt like I had no control. I think in a corresponding way, in a gay direction, that's what happened to Freddie a bit later on.

But it didn't really change our relationship with him very much, because we were always very close in the studio. And when we spoke of, you know, love stories in the studio, there was no distinction. You could be in love with whoever you wanted to be and the song would still make sense. But from the *Jazz* album onward, it would always cross my mind, because I would be writing words for Freddie to sing. And it became a little game for me to write stuff for him that would make sense whichever way he saw it.

> *"I always thought three or more guitars making all those harmonies would be the most exciting thing."*

GW So your writing acquired a kind of...

MAY Yeah, another dimension. In fact, I can remember having a go at Freddie because some of the stuff he was writing was very definitely on the gay side. I remember saying, "It would be nice if this stuff could be universally applicable, because we have friends out there of every persuasion." It's nice to involve people. What it's not nice to do is rope people out, and I felt kind of roped out by something that was very overtly a gay anthem, like "Body Language" [Hot Space, *1982*]. I thought it was very hard to take that in the other way. It's hard to talk about this. But there you go.

GW I think it was maybe difficult for some of the hard rock fans when Freddie adopted a more overtly gay image.

MAY Yeah. It's a strange area, isn't it? I mean, you've got Rob Halford, who is definitely a heavy metal icon. So it must be strange for people to realize where he's coming from. But, I mean, it really shouldn't matter. That's my feeling. Everybody has their own sexual chemistry that leads them to desire certain things. You cannot attack someone for having desires in certain directions, because they have no control over that, do they. It makes no sense. It's like attacking someone for having a long nose or being a wrong color. You can't do that. You judge people by how they behave with the cards that they are dealt.

And heavy metal is a strange thing. There's a lot of bravado to heavy metal. I think we're all kind of afraid of women to a certain extent, even the most heterosexual of us. And heavy metal tends to be a kind of safe place where you can make bold statements about "what you did with your chick last night." It's a nice, simple world. It's full of loud stuff and heavy things and strong statements. That's why it's such a great release for chaps. I love it. AC/DC is complete therapy. You go to the show and you're deaf for a week. It's wonderful. I'm desperately sad that I had to miss a Black Sabbath reunion show recently. It was Black Sabbath and the Foo Fighters, who I love. And Pantera, who I also love. Unfortunately, I had to be some place else.

GW We should discuss the evolution of your layered

THE BIG RED ONE

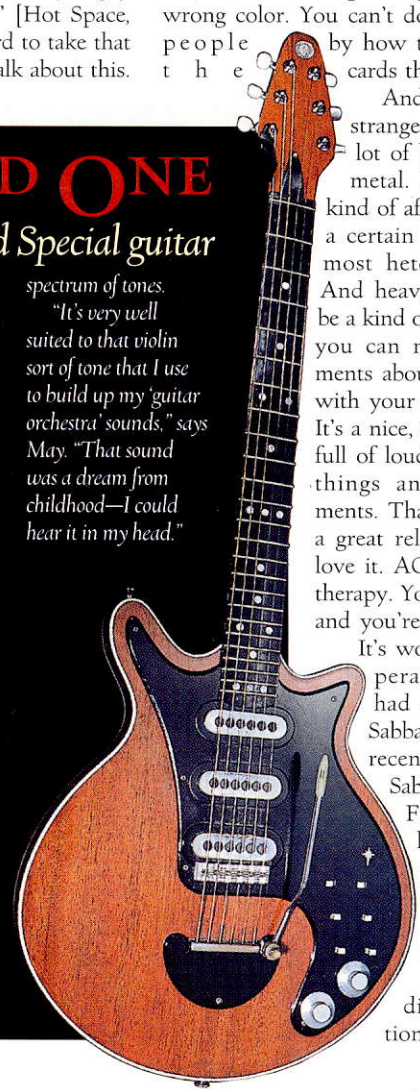
Brian May's homemade Red Special guitar

Brian May designed and built his Red Special guitar when he was a teenager, and it has been his main guitar ever since. He played it on every Queen album and tour, as well as on his numerous side projects and two solo albums, Back to the Light and Another World.

Brian and his dad began work on the Red Special in 1962, and took two years to complete it. "I was 17 when it was finished," he recalls. "I knew I wanted a guitar that would sing and have warmth, but also a nice articulating edge. We tried to design a solidbody guitar that had all the advantages of a hollowbody—the ability to feed back in just the right way."

The Red Special is a masterpiece of inventive domestic craftsmanship. The motorcycle kickstand was the source for the spring in the vibrato tailpiece, and the oak body came from a fireplace mantel. The massive neck (Brian has big hands) contributes to the Red Special's trademark warm sustain. So does the unique switching system that May designed for the instrument's three single-coil Burns pickups. Each pickup has its own on/off switch and phase switch, making it possible to effect a broad spectrum of tones.

"It's very well suited to that violin sort of tone that I use to build up my 'guitar orchestra' sounds," says May. "That sound was a dream from childhood—I could hear it in my head."



guitar sound. It's there, fully formed, on the first song of the first album: "Keep Yourself Alive." Even on the Larry Lurex single, it's there in embryonic form. [*Shortly before the first Queen album came out in '73, Freddie Mercury released a single under the name Larry Lurex, with May on guitar.*]

MAY You're absolutely right. It was a dream right from the beginning. I was always into the sound of harmonies, whether it was vocal harmonies or harmonies between instruments of an orchestra. And I always was fascinated with what that did to you—the Everly Brothers, and the backing vocal harmonies on Buddy Holly and the Crickets' "Maybe Baby." It sounds very simple now. But it just sent shivers up your spine—a huge emotional impact.

Actually, Jeff [*Beck*] had a lot to do with this, too, because of his single "Hi-Ho Silver Lining" [*1967*]. Remember the solo in that? It was double tracked. In those days producers, as you know, would say, 'Hey, Jeff, double track that.' Jeff double tracked it, but he deviated in the middle and it became a two-part harmony—full-blown, spikey overdriven electric guitar going into harmony. And I remember thinking, What a glorious sound that is.

> *"Freddie didn't have a great technical ability on the guitar, but he had it in his head. You could feel this stuff bursting to get out."*

I don't know to this day whether it was intentional or not on Jeff's part; I've never asked him. Jeff hates the track, anyway. Thinks it's crap. But he sings really well on it. And it has one of the great solos of all time. [*sings opening bars*] Like a voice. That's always been my guiding principle. The guitar should be like a voice.

Freddie Mercury and May on the *Day at the Races* tour, in Amsterdam, 1977

So I'd always dreamed that if you could get three or more guitars working, full blown, as the instruments of an orchestra, making all those harmonies—not just going in parallel, but actually making all those dissonances and crossing over one another—I always thought that would be the most exciting thing to hear in the world. So the first time we ever got in a studio, obviously I was trying it out. I think the first attempt was on "Earth," which we did with Smile [*Prior to Queen's formation, May and Roger Taylor played in a band called Smile*]—a two-part harmony thing. But yes, it was always there. I was always wondering how far I could take it. I still love it. I try to restrain myself. Because if you do it all the time, it could get really boring.

GW What's involved in getting the sustain necessary to make those harmonies sing like that? Were you using compression? Is it just amp overdrive?

MAY It is just amp overdrive, really. It's just the way those Voxes behave. I was wedded to these AC30s from an early age. I had a couple of transistor amplifiers when I was starting off. They didn't sound any good. I used to use a fuzz box to get them to sustain. Then I got a Rangemaster treble booster, the kind that [*Irish blues guitarist*] Rory Gallagher used to use. And then I went over with my guitar just to try out some amps in Wardour Street [*in London*]. I must have been about 18 or something when I was just starting out playing in bands. I plugged into an AC30 and suddenly it was there: the sound I'd always dreamed of! It had that warmth and sustain. It would go into overdrive very smoothly. I only afterward found out the reason: The AC30s are a different kind of amplifier from the normal kind of Marshall stack. They're a Class A amplifier, which actually does give you a high-quality signal at low levels and then very smoothly goes into distortion and saturation. And I fell in love with them.

So there's really no effect on there. I just use a treble booster and the guitar. The treble boosters are a copy of the Rangemaster, actually, these little silver stomp boxes. I've always used one of those. But you've got to drive it hard. You can trim the capacitors inside to adjust how much bottom you actually roll off and how much top you roll off

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(from left) May, John Deacon (standing), Roger Taylor and Mercury fancy a shag

NEIL ZLOZOWER

as well. They don't actually transmit the top end that well either, which is good. It's what gives you that vocal kind of sound.

GW By the time you get to something like "Procession" on the second album [Queen II] it sounds as though you're using really radical EQ to shape the tone of different guitar layers.

MAY You know what that is? That's this Deakey amp [*points out a small homemade-looking box with a roughly five-inch speaker*]. It's a little one-watt amp that John Deacon built and brought into the studio one day. I had done "Procession" with AC30s, and it sounded just a little bit too smooth. I wanted it to sound more violinlike and orchestral, so I double tracked some of the layers using that little amp. Incredible. I've used it ever since on anything where there's a real orchestral-type sound. And depending where you put the microphone in front of that amp, you can really tune the sound. It's very directional. It's a germanium-transistor amp, which is transformer coupled—unlike things these days; that isn't really done anymore—with silicon transistors. There's this guy, Dave Peters, who is one of the designers of the AC30 and a real expert on valve electronics and the early days of transistors. I'm working with him trying to reproduce the Deakey amp. Maybe we'll put it on the market. I have to talk to John about it, as it happens, because John made the thing and he's very kindly allowed me to use it ever since. It's pretty magical.

GW Another thing about the sound produced from layering is that the initial onset of notes—the attack—has a pronounced, crisp crackle to it. Does that come as a result of the English sixpence you use as a pick? Is it a coin with ridges on the side?

MAY Exactly. The English sixpence is made of a soft metal, but it has a serrated edge. And if you turn it parallel to the strings, all that disappears, because it's nice and rounded. As soon as you angle it then, the serrations will give you a very pronounced attack. It gives you that splutter, which I love. It also really connects me to the string. I don't like picks that bend, because I find I'm not really in contact. I'm not really experiencing everything that happens between the pick and the string. I like the firmness of the sixpence.

GW Early on, were you combining layered overdubs with other tape-manipulation techniques? On something like "Ogre Battle" [Queen II], it sounds like maybe there's some backward-tape stuff happening there.

MAY Yes, there's a lot of backward stuff there. We were like boys let loose in a room full of toys. I would sometimes say to Roy [*Thomas Baker, Queen's first producer*], "Just give me that tape backward on cassette, and I'll go home and learn it backward." I would learn it backward and play on it the next day. Sometimes the mistakes came out better than the actual thing you'd planned. That's one of the things you lose when recording in digital. And you can't do the stuff where you'd lean on the reels and it would go *eeeoo-ouuuggghhhh*.

GW Tape flanging.

MAY You can't do that with digital tape. And we used to do a lot of tape flanging

in Queen. We loved manipulating [*analog*] tapes. I do miss all that. You can do some of those things in other ways, to a point, when you're working on digital, but it's not very manipulable. I recently started getting into analog recording again, actually.

GW Did Queen's layered vocal sound develop concurrently with the layered guitar thing?

MAY Concurrently, I think. Freddie and I shared the feeling that harmonic content was a magic thing. Freddie started off as a showman almost before he was a singer. Maybe I'll get shot for saying this: I don't think any of us realized what a potential he had for being a singer until we got in the studio. As soon as he was able to hear himself and work with his voice and multitrack it, he just grew exponentially. He became so skillful at using his voice as an instrument. All of a sudden he was in there doing all these harmonies. And a lot of them we would do together because we were very fortunate in having three voices that gave an instant blend. Some of those things which sound like a 100-piece choir were just the three of us doing each line twice. And that's why it remains kind of in your face. It's not like a big football crowd; it's a more intimate sound. And it was just a lucky combination. Freddie had this really wonderful clear, bell-like tone, which you can recognize on a transistor radio 10 miles away. I still can. I know when it's Freddie. And Roger also had a remarkable voice, a very raspy sound, but Roger could sing very high and be very strong in the high registers. And I had this voice which, I suppose, filled in the gaps that the others didn't have. I had probably more warmth, and I was probably less in tune. That's my theory, anyway. And somehow the three just worked together. Although Freddie did some of that stuff on his own. The first thing you hear in "Bohemian Rhapsody" is just Freddie multitracking himself. He could sing so accurately, double tracking, that it would phase. Quite amazing.

GW What do you recall about coming up with your guitar bits for "Bohemian Rhapsody"?

MAY Freddie came in pretty well armed for that song. He had these little pieces of company paper from his dad with the notes of the chords. As I remember, I don't think he had a guitar solo as such planned. I guess I steamed in and said, "This is the point where you need your solo. And these are the chords I'd like to use." Because it's like a piece of the verse, but with a slight foray into some different chords at the end to make a transition into the next piece that he had. I'd heard the track so many times that, when it came time to play the solo, I knew what I wanted to play, in my head. And I wanted the melody of the solo to be something extra, not just an echo of the vocal melody. I wanted it to be an extra color. So I just had this little tune in my head to play. It didn't take very long to do.

The heavy part was really part of Freddie's plan. I didn't change what he had very much. Those riff things that everybody bangs their heads to are really more Freddie than me.

GW It's such a guitar riff.

MAY Yeah. A great guitar riff. But Freddie could do that. Freddie also wrote "Ogre Battle," which is a very heavy metal guitar riff. It's strange that he should have done that. But when Freddie used to pick up a guitar he'd have a great frenetic energy. It was kind of like a very nervy animal playing the guitar. He was a very impatient person and was very impatient with his own technique. He didn't have a great technical ability on the guitar but had it in his head. And you could feel this stuff bursting to get out. His right hand would move incredibly fast. He wrote a lot of good stuff for the guitar. A lot of it was stuff which I would not have thought of, because it would be in weird keys. He had this penchant for playing in E flat and A flat and F. And these

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are not places that your hand naturally falls on playing the guitar. So he forced me into finding ways of doing things which made unusual sounds. It was really good. "Tie Your Mother Down," which I wrote, is in A. Whereas "Bohemian Rhapsody" or "We Are the Champions" or "Killer Queen" are all in weird keys. So if there are any open strings in there at all, it's very unusual.

But getting back to "Bohemian Rhapsody": in the end, I sort of took over. I wanted to orchestrate that. There's a little bit of orchestration coming out of the last chorus bit. Little violinlike lines. And that blended in very well with what he was doing with the little outro piece. If I were to do it now, however, I would adjust the tuning. It's not quite right. Things like that bother me a lot these days, because if you get overexcited, the guitars really go sharp. And that's what happened there. I'm giving away precious secrets. You can tell, because the piano sounds a little flat in the end. And that's because I was a little over the top in vibrating there. These days I would probably harmonize it down to make it in tune. And that probably would have ruined it.

GW Are there any major Queen songs that you didn't play on your Red Special guitar? "Long Away," for instance, sounds like you used a Rickenbacker.

MAY "Long Away" is a Burns 12-string. I couldn't play Rickenbackers because the necks are too thin. I like a very fat and wide neck. My fingers only work in that situation. I always wanted to play a Rickenbacker because John Lennon did. Roger collects extremely fucking rare guitars, and he has a Rickenbacker, but I can't play it. So normally I've used [*the Red Special*] for everything. The only other exception is "Crazy Little Thing Called Love" [The Game], where they forced me to use an ancient Telecaster that was lying around Musicland [*recording studio*] in Munich.

GW What do you mean they "forced" you to use it?

MAY Ah, [*producer*] Mack [*Josh Macrae*] forced me. I told him, "Look, I can do this with my guitar, because the bridge pickup has certain tones that sound like a Telecaster." And he went, "You want it to sound like a Telecaster, use a Telecaster!"

GW This may be a naive question, but what inspired you to write "Fat Bottomed Girls"?

MAY I could give you a glib answer, couldn't I. But I think the chorus just popped into my head as a tune and a set of words, same as "Tie Your Mother Down" did. I didn't know what the hell "Tie Your Mother Down" was supposed to mean, off the top of my head, but it became something that meant something: a teenage rebellion song. And "Fat Bottomed Girls" became a song about the girls who help the spirits of the performers backstage, I suppose—the groupies or whatever. In light of what we were saying before about Freddie's sexual orientation, I remember thinking, Freddie's going to have to sing this and I'm going to write it so you can take it any way you like. You can be into anything and this would still make sense. And I remember thinking, This is kind of interesting: why does everybody love casual sex with people that they otherwise wouldn't want to be with? Why does that mean so much to them? Where does it come from? So some of the words are about things that people will possibly remember from their youth.

I saw a smile cross Freddie's face when he was singing it, but we never talked about it. We didn't with our songs. You'd think we would talk about our lyrics with each other, but we never did. It was kind of an unwritten law that you really didn't explain your lyrics to the other guys. But I wanted Freddie to be comfortable with it. And it's a fun song. But I still wonder how Freddie felt about it. I don't know if he knew that I wrote things to make it fun for him, too.

GW It's wonderful the way you married that lyric to a very folksy melody. It's almost like some old folk ballad—this character telling the story of the loss of his innocence at an early age.

MAY It's a sort of swamp atmosphere, isn't it. I love that. I have a great affection for that song, and I played it in my own way when I was touring with Cozy and the boys. [*The late drummer Cozy Powell anchored May's live band for the past five years.*] And the girls enjoy it. The girls who sang with me enjoyed it. They were not fat bottomed. but they're definitely girls. I mean, there's loads I could say here, but that's probably enough for now.

GW If Freddie hadn't died, do you think Queen would have continued?

MAY I think so. I think we would be taking breaks, but I think we would have been soldiering on, and it probably would have been fun. But I think we all needed some kind of release from Queen. Along with the grief at Freddie's death, I did feel a certain sense of release, because it's nice in some ways to be chucked out on your own. You have to find new ways of expressing yourself. And I've enjoyed that; I've enjoyed propelling myself down the road of singing. It's become one of the most important things that I try to do. But I think, yes, if Queen were still there in the background, we would be coming back to it again and again, because it was always stimulating to work with Freddie. Along with the difficulties of having to share the power, which we all felt, there was a certain magic there. The four of us had a balance. We were a real group. There was a great strength in the band. ■

"'Fat Bottomed Girls' became a song about the girls who help the spirits of the performers backstage. I saw a smile cross Freddie's face when he was singing it, but we never talked about it."

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By Alan di Perna

Crowning Achievements

IN 2002, *Brian May* TOOK TIME OUT TO REFLECT ON A QUEEN BOX SET, A DVD COMPILATION, A STAGE MUSICAL BASED ON QUEEN'S HIT SONGS AND THE EXTRAORDINARY LEGACY OF HIS BRILLIANT BAND.

REPRINTED FROM *GUITAR WORLD*, FEBRUARY 2003

Queen in London, December 1973

MICK ROCK/STAR FILE

OCTOBER 18, 2002, 11:30 A. M.: A large crowd of people gathers on the street at 6356 Hollywood Boulevard, many of them carrying Queen album sleeves, photographs, makeshift posters and other mementos of the eternally popular British rock group. The Queen-crazed mob lets fly a collective howl of delight the instant the band's guitarist, Brian May, and drummer, Roger Taylor, step out onto a low, carpeted platform that had been erected on the sidewalk. Mr. Johnny Grant, the honorary mayor of Hollywood, presides as May and Taylor kneel on the pavement and unveil Queen's brand-new star on the city's Walk of Fame. The 2,207th such plaque to be fitted into Hollywood's most famous thoroughfare, the coveted stellar monument places Queen in the distinguished show-biz company of immortals like Marilyn Monroe, Elvis Presley, the Beatles and Charlie Chaplin.

That night, a party and impromptu jam takes place at a funky Hollywood bar, celebrating Queen's enshrinement in America's sidewalk of dreams. Steve Vai, Nuno Bettencourt and Carmine Appice are among the special guests who climb onstage that evening. But the most raucous applause comes when May straps on his venerable Red Special guitar and Taylor mans the drum kit. The duo leads the way through gangbuster renditions of Queen classics like "Tie Your Mother Down," "Under Pressure," "I'm in Love with My Car" and "Crazy Little Thing Called Love." The entire packed house sings along. Young and old, hipsters, rock geeks, smarmy music biz types—everyone knows the words.

"I was really thrilled," May later says of the ceremony and its aftermath. "In England it would have been much more formal. But in L.A. there's a more relaxed vibe that I really enjoy. It is a place where I've had a home since the early Eighties. So for me it's a great personal thrill to be part of the fabric of Los Angeles."

Far more than just another shiny thread in L.A.'s synthetic cultural garment, Queen are integral to the fabric of rock and roll itself. Rock history would be appreciably less radiant had classics like "Killer Queen," "Bohemian Rhapsody," "Fat Bottomed Girls," "We Are the Champions" and "Another One Bites the Dust" not been recorded. And rock guitar playing would certainly be a poorer thing without the soaring harmonies of Brian May's Red Special. The death of lead singer Freddie Mercury in 1991 has done nothing to diminish Queen's stature. If anything, Mercury's passing has helped to confirm the band's place in the classic rock pantheon.

Queen's new star on the Walk of Fame is just one of many recent band-related honors and activities, all of which seem to be leading up to the band's 30th anniversary in 2003. "I've never had a year like this, where so much has happened," says May. "So much positivity and creativity."

May and Taylor spent June 3, 2002, in style, performing at the Golden Jubilee show at Buckingham Palace, honoring the 50-year reign of that other famous English Queen, Elizabeth II. *We Will Rock You*, the stage musical based on Queen's hit songs, is breaking box office records in London's West End. *The Queen Symphony*, also based on the group's music and composed by Tolga Kashif, was performed for the first time ever by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra at London's Royal Festival Hall on November 6. May was recently awarded an honorary doctorate in England. Queen's latest three-CD box set, *Greatest Hits I II & III*, is selling briskly. And the band's American label, Hollywood Records, has just put out a DVD collection, *Greatest Video Hits 1*.

The two-disc DVD package was assembled by two bright young men of British television, Simon Lupton and Rhys Thomas. "They're two guys who I met purely by chance," says May. "I did the music for an English series called *Fun at the Funeral Parlour*, which Rhys wrote and Simon produced. And I discovered they were real, true Queen fans and knew everything about us. So they were a natural choice when we started to put together the DVD. They did a fantastic job. They bring youth, vitality and new angles to it."

(from left) Brian May, Roger Taylor (top), Freddie Mercury and John Deacon

The CD and DVD collections afford ample opportunity to reflect on Queen's long and stellar career. The band's stylistically diverse, harmonically adventurous music now seems a timeless part of the classic rock cannon. But as the videos make clear, Queen were very much part of the glam rock early Seventies—both originators and products of the post-hippie *Zeitgeist* that gave rise to stacked heels, sequin-encrusted stage regalia and tons of makeup for boys. Clip after clip finds Mercury, May, Taylor and bassist John Deacon decked out in androgynous finery, often created by designer Zandra Rhodes.

"The image and concept of the band were there from the beginning," says May, "before there even was something called glam. In fact, I remember going to see David Bowie at the Rainbow Theater in [*London's*] Finsbury Park very early in his career. I was very excited about what he was doing, but also very apprehensive because I was afraid people would think that we were jumping on his bandwagon. Whereas we'd been on our own for quite a while anyway, although we were not well known at the time. It took us a hellish long time to get our first album out and state our position, musically and image-wise.

"On the radio at the time, there were things like Sweet and

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Marc Bolan. We didn't really feel a part of that, because that was basically a pop sensibility. And what we were trying to achieve, I suppose, was a sort of melodic rock, rather than a pop creation. It's hard to define the difference between pop and rock. But I know what it is instinctively. I think most people do. You feel an affinity for one side of it or the other."

A studious young man who had planned on an academic career in astrophysics, May did make an unlikely glam icon. But he placed his scientific brain at the service of rock and roll when he built his own electric guitar at age 16, working together with his father. A masterpiece of quirky inventiveness, the instrument's body was fashioned of wood from an old fireplace. The tremolo arm mechanism came from a motorcycle kickstand. Most guitarists outgrow their adolescent axes, but this homemade, three-pickup, double-cutaway instrument, May's beloved Red Special, was to become his lifelong, signature guitar. The main component in one of rock music's most distinctive guitar tones, the Red Special has been copied several times over the years—for May's personal use as a spare instrument in some cases, and for commercial consumption in others. May is particularly enthusiastic about the newest Red Special model, by British guitar manufacturer Burns.

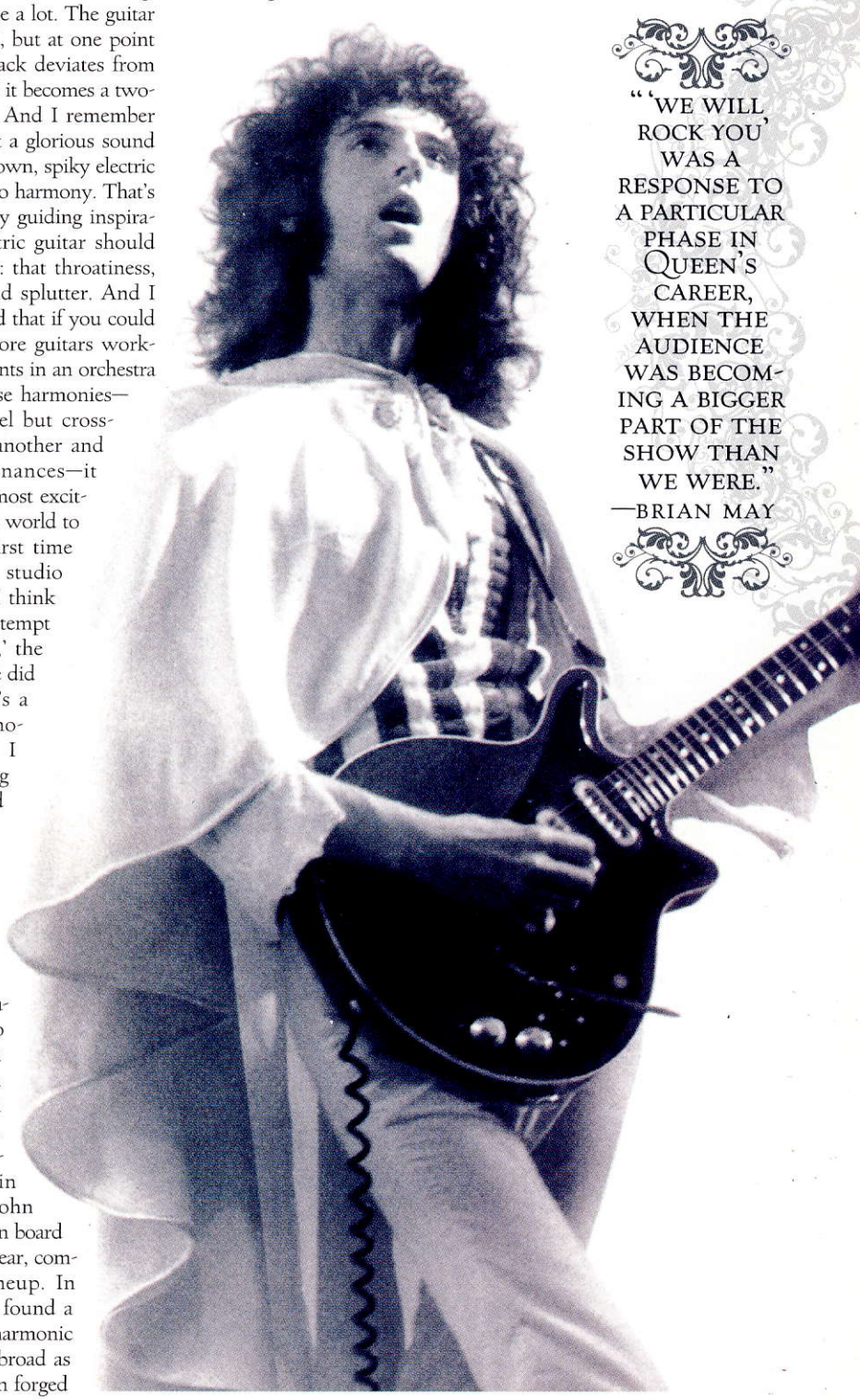
"Like my own guitar, it has noticeably good sustain, which is part of my style of playing. But I guess the biggest factor is that it's very cheap. I don't know quite how they managed to do it, but they did make it at a price that's affordable by kids. And that's what I wanted. I didn't want the Red Special to be an elitist thing anymore. I wanted people to be able to buy it and play it."

Pumped through a Rangemaster treble booster and a bank of Vox AC30s, the Red Special produces a creamy, sustained tone that has always formed the basis for the rich layers of overdubbed guitar harmonies that constitute May's towering contribution to rock guitar playing. "It was my dream from the beginning," he says. "I was always into the sound of harmonies, whether it was vocal harmonies or harmonies between the instruments in an orchestra. I was always fascinated by what the vocal harmonies did to you on records by the Everly Brothers and the Crickets. They just sent shivers up your spine and gave those recordings huge emotional content. Jeff Beck's song 'Hi Ho Silver Lining' also inspired me a lot. The guitar solo is doubled, but at one point the doubled track deviates from the melody and it becomes a two-part harmony. And I remember thinking, What a glorious sound that is: a full-blown, spiky electric guitar going into harmony. That's always been my guiding inspiration. The electric guitar should be like a voice: that throatiness, forcefulness and splutter. And I always dreamed that if you could get three or more guitars working as instruments in an orchestra making all these harmonies—not just parallel but crossing over one another and making dissonances—it would be the most exciting thing in the world to hear. So the first time I got into the studio I tried it out. I think the very first attempt was on 'Earth,' the [1969] single we did with Smile. It's a two-part harmony thing, but I was wondering how far I could take it."

Smile was the pre-Queen band that May formed with Roger Taylor in 1967. The group metamorphosed into Queen when Tanzania-born singer Farroukh Bulsara (a.k.a. Freddie Mercury) joined in 1970. Bassist John Deacon came on board the following year, completing the lineup. In Mercury, May found a singer whose harmonic vistas were as broad as his own. Queen forged a huge sound based on lavish vocal harmonies and countermelodies interlaced with stacked guitars, the whole thing supported by a heavy rock backbeat.

"We were very fortunate in having three voices that gave an interesting blend," says May. "Freddie had this wonderful, clear, bell-like tone which you can recognize on a transistor radio 10 miles away. And Roger has a remarkable voice also: very raspy, but he could sing very high and be strong in those upper registers. And I have this voice which I suppose filled in the gaps. I probably had more warmth than the others, and I was probably less in tune!"

Queen's attention-grabbing sound made an almost immedi-

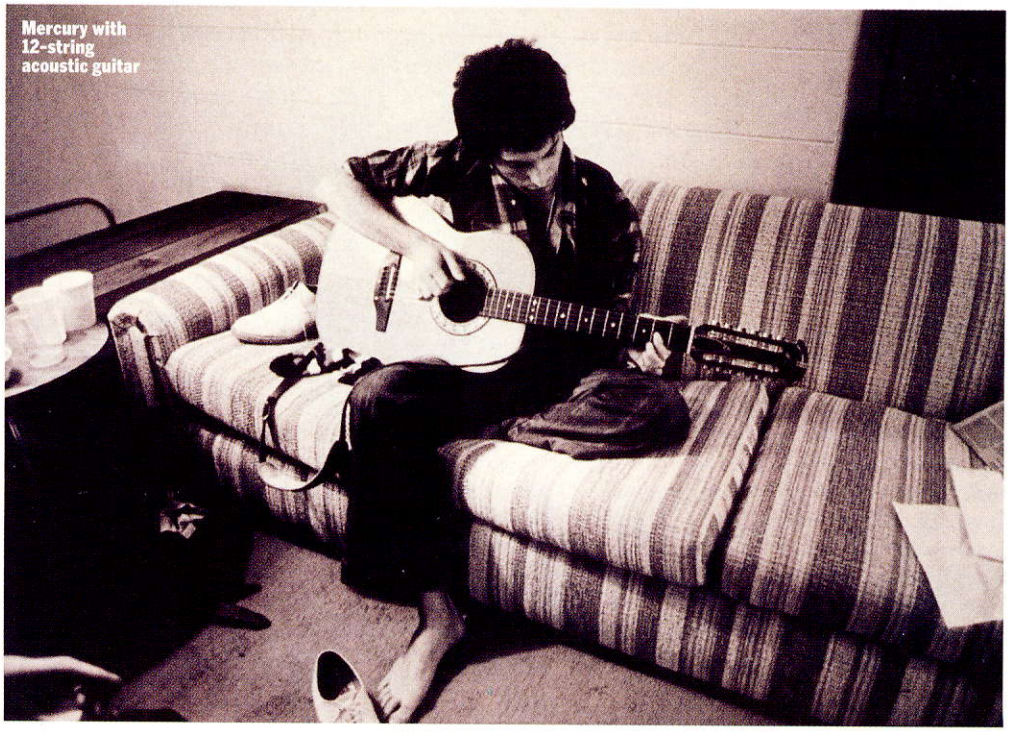


"'WE WILL ROCK YOU' WAS A RESPONSE TO A PARTICULAR PHASE IN QUEEN'S CAREER, WHEN THE AUDIENCE WAS BECOMING A BIGGER PART OF THE SHOW THAN WE WERE."
—BRIAN MAY

PAUL CANTY/LFI

ate impact in England via early songs like "Keep Yourself Alive," "Seven Seas of Rhye" and "Procession," from the band's first two albums, *Queen* (1973) and *Queen II* (1974). But the band broke out worldwide with its first American hit, "Killer Queen," from the *Sheer Heart Attack* album (1974). Recording this track wasn't easy for May, who had been laid low by the band's first American tour with glam rockers Mott the Hoople.

"I was very sick the first time Freddie played me this new song he'd written called 'Killer Queen,' " May recalls. "I was laying in my room at Rockfield [*the legendary residential rock studio in Wales*]. After that first American tour I had hepatitis and then I had very bad stomach problems [*a duodenal ulcer*—GW *Ed*]. So at that point I was just feeling sick 20 hours a day. And I remember feeling very depressed laying there hearing Freddie play this song. 'Cause I thought, I can't even get out of bed to participate in recording this. Maybe the group will have to go on without me. Nobody could figure out what was wrong with me. It was really bad. But then I did go into the hospital and I got fixed up, thank God. And when I got out, we were able to finish off 'Killer Queen.' They had recorded most of it, leaving space for the guitar. So I did the solo, with the three-part guitar harmony counterpoint, where each part has its own voice. Plus there's another little block of guitar harmony that comes in. I also had strong feelings about one of the vocal harmony bits in the chorus, so we had another go at that. I'm really very happy with that song. It was made in a very craftsmanlike manner. There's a lot to listen to, but it never gets cluttered. There's always space for the little ideas to come through."



Mercury with 12-string acoustic guitar

The song showcases Mercury's fondness for the vaudeville and music hall traditions of the pre-rock era. These styles had been tapped in the Sixties by groups like the Beatles and the Kinks, but Mercury reintroduced these genres to rock at a whole new level of over-the-top, campy bombast. Queen's lead singer was equally in love with the stagey melodrama of grand opera. The early Seventies were a time when many progressive rock groups were drawing on classical music. But where these musicians were generally deadly serious, Mercury brought an outlandish sense of humor and frivolity to his appropriation of operatic forms. A highly capable keyboardist, Mercury, like May, chose to emphasize orchestration and attitude over displays of solo virtuosity. This gave Queen a unique and ideal place in the Seventies rock landscape. Their music offered harmonic sophistication on a par with prog rock but with none of prog's stuffy self-importance. It was an incredibly winning combination.

In both their humor and their penchant for massive musical arrangements, Queen were well matched with Roy Thomas Baker. The eccentric British producer had been instrumental in signing Queen to a deal with Trident Audio Productions. In Baker, they'd essentially teamed up with the Keith Moon of rock engineering—a man whose appetite for audio excess knew no limits. The Queen/Baker collaboration found perhaps its greatest expression in the band's next hit. "Bohemian Rhapsody," from the 1975 masterpiece *A Night at the Opera*, is probably the best-loved Queen song of them all. It has often been voted the greatest rock song of all time by critics and fans.

According to May, the epic "Rhapsody," with its many segues, mood swings and flights of choral fancy, was "Freddie's baby entirely. We just helped him bring it to life. He would come into the studio armed with these little pieces of company paper from his dad's office, with the notes to the chords scribbled all over them in Freddie's own particular fashion. It wasn't musical notation, but As and Bs and Cs and sharps in blocks—like buses zooming all over his bits of paper. We played a backing track which left the gaps and he would go, 'Bum bum bum, that's what happens here...' He knew exactly what he was doing all along. He had it all in his head."

Audible evidence of May's statement can be gleaned from a short film on the new DVD called *Inside the Rhapsody*. In it, May presides over a playback of the original multitrack master for "Bohemian Rhapsody," soloing guitar tracks, vocal harmonies and other parts, tracing the evolution of the song in the studio. We hear Mercury on piano, leading Deacon and Taylor through a flawless basic track, played from beginning to end, apparently, without the aid of a click track to establish tempo. Then we hear the layers and layers of guitars and vocals start to pile up.

"We were stretching the limits of technology in those days," says May. "It was all 16-track [*analog*]. We had to do a lot of bouncing as we went along, and the tape got very worn. The legendary story that people think we made up is really true. We held the tape up to the light one day—we'd been wondering where all the top end was going—and we discovered we had virtually a transparent piece of tape. All the oxide had gotten rubbed off in the course of all those overdubs. It was time to hurriedly make a copy and get on with finishing the track."

The overwhelming success of "Bohemian Rhapsody" when it was first released in 1975 was boosted by director Bruce Gowers' groundbreaking video clip—a work that predates the MTV era by a good five years and is generally hailed as one of the most influential rock videos of all time. Kicking off the *Greatest Video Hits* DVD, the "Bohemian Rhapsody" clip looks as good as ever, and has acquired a new sonic dimension thanks to a DTS 5.1 surround sound remix of the track

MERCURY/PHOENIX TRUST/CAMERA PRESS/RETNA (LEFT); DAVID REDFERN/RETNA (RIGHT)

Onstage in London, September 1984

Onstage, circa 1974

IAN DICKSON/STAR FILE

specially prepared by May and Roy Thomas Baker in collaboration with Elliot Scheiner. (The threesome also remixed "You're My Best Friend" for 5.1 surround. Fourteen other tracks received 5.1 remixes from Justin Shirley-Smith.) These remixes brought May and Baker together for the first time in years.

"We had a great time," says the guitarist. "Roy's a laugh. He'll give the impression that he's not paying attention. But he'll suddenly come up with the most penetrating comment or observation and crucially change the mix. He's always been like that. He has unusual insights. He's a very interesting and colorful character."

Following in the wake of *A Night at the Opera*'s success, Baker guided Queen through 1976's *A Day at the Races*. (Both albums take their titles from 1930s films by the Marx Brothers, who enjoyed a huge revival in popularity during the Seventies.) That album yielded indispensable Queen classics like "Tie Your Mother Down," "Long Away" and "Somebody to Love." But Queen struck off on their own for the next album, *News of the World* (1977), producing the disc themselves, with assistance from their longtime engineer Mike Stone. This shift in direction is dramatically apparent on the album's opening track, the instant anthem "We Will Rock You." By this time, the punk rock revolution was underway. And Queen responded with what has become the ultimate boot boy, football hooligan chant. Where earlier Queen hits had been remarkable for their lavish production, "We Will Rock You" is stripped and stark—just voices, stomping and clapping for the most part. Only at the end does May's guitar come roaring in for a vituperative chordal outro solo.

"'We Will Rock You,'" May recalls, "was a response to a particular phase in Queen's career, when the audience was becoming a bigger part of the show than we were. They would sing all the songs. And in a place like Birmingham, they'd be so vociferous that we'd have to stop the show and let them sing to us. So both Freddie and I thought it would be an interesting experiment to write a song with audience participation specifically in mind. My feeling was that everyone can stamp and clap and sing a simple motif, so 'We Will Rock You' was based on that. We recorded it at [*Basing Street*] Wessex, which is an old converted church that has a natural good sound to it. There are no drums on the track. It's just us clapping and stamping on boards, overdubbed many times over with many primitive delay machines. A bit of singing, a bit of guitar playing, and that's it. The amazing thing is to go to football [*soccer*] matches or sports events in general and hear people do it. It's very gratifying to find that it has become part of folklore, sort of. I'll die happy because of that."

Queen got back together with Baker one last time for 1978's *Jazz*, an album that yielded May's folksy tribute to the backstage ladies, "Fat Bottomed Girls."

"It just kind of popped into my head as a tune and a set of words," he says. "And it became a song about the girls who help raise the spirits of the performers backstage. The groupies or whatever. I remember thinking, Why does everybody love the idea of having casual sex with people that they otherwise wouldn't want to be with? Why does that mean so much to them? Where does that come from? And I also remember saying, 'Freddie's going to have to sing this, and I'm going to write it so that you can take it any way you like. You can be into anything, sexually, and the song would still make sense."

As the Seventies drew to a close, Queen's lead singer was

May and Pink Floyd guitarist David Gilmore in London, 1989

May in recording studio, 1983

no longer making a secret of his sexual orientation. The fact that Freddie Mercury was gay came as a big surprise to many Queen fans. And to Brian May as well, apparently.

"Early on, it didn't exist," says the guitarist. "Or if it did, we never saw it. And I don't think Freddie was aware of it, either. In the early days, we used to share rooms, so I would have known! Freddie had some gorgeous girls. And it was only later on...I couldn't really pin down the exact time, but there was a point where we realized that Freddie was leading a bit of a different social life than the rest of us. He'd just go off on his own and say, 'See you later.' Gradually, he was venturing off into these other areas. He was encouraged by certain people who sort of brought him out, I guess. One of whom was our personal manager at the time. He was a pretty over-the-top kind of person, and I think Freddie found himself in places where he wouldn't naturally have gotten to if that door hadn't been forcibly opened for him. Do you know what I'm saying? I think he would have drifted into finding himself sexually in a more gradual way if it hadn't all suddenly exploded on him. I can remember the Mott the Hoople tour [1973–74], which was the first time I ever experienced sex on a grand scale. And it was almost really not my decision. It kind of happened to me. I felt like I had no control. And I think in a corresponding way, but in a gay direction, that's what happened to Freddie a bit later on.

"But it didn't really change our relationship with Freddie in the band. Because we were always very close in the studio. And when we spoke of, you know, love stories, there was no distinction. You could be in love with whoever you wanted and the song would still make sense. But from the *Jazz* album onward, it would always cross my mind. Because I would be writing words for Freddie to sing. And it became a little game for me to write stuff for him which would make sense any way you cared to interpret it, straight or gay."

Queen are one of the great ironies of rock history. Fellow glam era acts like Mott the Hoople, David Bowie and Roxy Music had limited impact in the States because the homoerotic overtones of their presentation frightened off many American rock fans—although most of those artists have always asserted that they are exclusively or primarily heterosexual. But of all those bands, Queen had by far the largest following in the States—owing, in no small part, to their heavy metal leanings. Yet they turned out to be the one group whose frontman was genuinely gay. And he was increasingly open about it as time went on. Mercury pissed off Seventies metalheads by sporting the gay male uniform of the day: short hair, moustache, muscles and tank tops. Part of the negative response to Mercury's coming out was plain, simple, ugly homophobia. But, compounding the problem, this was also a time when rock music was in danger of being eclipsed by disco—the dance music of the urban, gay, multiracial subculture that had been brought into the mainstream by artists like the Village People and Donna Summer. With his new look, Mercury could easily have passed for one of the Village People, which made him seem a traitor to rock music in the eyes of some fans. Some disgruntled punters even took to throwing razor blades onto the stage at Queen concerts, offering an unsubtle hint that Mercury should shave off his moustache. As if to rub salt in

the wound, Queen kicked off the Eighties with the unapologetically disco/funk hit single "Another One Bites the Dust," from their 1980 album, *The Game*. Perhaps the most ironic part of this was that the song was written not by Mercury but by Queen's reclusive "quiet one," John Deacon.

"John, being totally in his own world, came up with this thing which was nothing like what we were doing," says May. "We were going for the big drum sound—you know, things which were quite pompous in our usual way. And Deaky says, 'No, I want this totally different: a very tight drum sound.' Originally, 'Another One Bites the Dust' was done to a drum loop. Because this was before the days of drum machines. Roger did a loop, somewhat under protest, because he didn't like the sound of the drums recorded that way. And then Deaky put down that incredible bass line. Immediately, Freddie became violently enthusiastic and said, 'This is big. This is important. I'm going to spend a lot of time on this.' So there it was. It was the first time one of our songs crossed over to the black community. We had no control over that. It just happened. One New York DJ picked up on it and suddenly we were forced to release the song as a single because so many stations in New York were playing it. The album went from being a million seller to a three-million seller in a matter of three weeks or so."

Unlike so many colossal rock acts of the "dinosaur" mid Seventies, Queen were able to make a transition into the Eighties—not only surviving but triumphing. They did so not by "selling out" to disco, as some feared back then, but by being willing to move with the times and reinvent themselves. *The Game* was the first of many Queen collaborations with the German producer Mack, who was to be as integral to their Eighties career as Roy Thomas Baker had been to their sonic identity in the Seventies. *The Game* yielded another

MICHAEL PUTLAND/RETNA (TOP LEFT); CHRIS WALTER/RETNA (TOP RIGHT); KEN SETTLE (BOTTOM)

substantial Queen hit, Mercury's rockabilly-tinged "Crazy Little Thing Called Love." It was the first record on which Mercury played guitar, although hardly the first time Mercury's guitar input had had an impact on Queen's music.

"Freddie could come up with great guitar riffs," says May. "The heavy part of 'Bohemian Rhapsody' [*"So you think you can stone me and spit in my eye..."*] was Freddie's riff. He also wrote 'Ogre Battle' [*from* Queen II], which is a very heavy metal guitar riff. Freddie used to pick up a guitar and he had a great, frenetic energy. It was kind of like a very nervy animal playing the guitar. He was a very impatient person, and he was impatient with his own technique. He didn't have a great technical ability on the guitar. But he had it all in his head. You could feel this stuff bursting to get out."

"Crazy Little Thing Called Love" is also one of the few tracks in the entire Queen catalog on which May did not play his Red Special. (Another is "Long Away," which was performed on a Burns 12-string). For "Crazy Little Thing" May used "an ancient Telecaster that was lying around the studio where we recorded the album, Musicland in Munich.

"Mack forced me to use it. I said, 'Look, I can do this with my guitar.' Because the bridge pickup has certain tones that sound like a Telecaster. But Mack said, 'If you want it to sound like a Telecaster, use a Telecaster.' "

Queen branched out in many different directions during the Eighties, becoming involved in film projects like *Flash Gordon* and the colorized rerelease of director Fritz Lang's 1926 silent classic *Metropolis*. Mercury, May, Deacon and Taylor all undertook solo albums and side projects such as May's Star Fleet Project with Eddie Van Halen and Phil Chen. But one collaboration that fell within the Queen opus was the band's memorable teaming with David Bowie for the hit single 'Under Pressure,' from 1982's *Hot Space*.

"IT BECAME A LITTLE GAME FOR ME TO WRITE STUFF FOR FREDDIE WHICH WOULD MAKE SENSE ANY WAY YOU CARED TO INTERPRET IT, STRAIGHT OR GAY."
—BRIAN MAY

"David was living in Switzerland, where we were recording in a studio we owned at the time [*Mountain Studios*] in Montreux," May recalls. "He basically just popped in to see us. Freddie had met him before. We all had a little chat and then went straight in the studio and started playing around. We played a few old songs and then something new started to happen and we said, 'Okay, let's try and record this.' It was a truly spontaneous thing. We felt our way through a backing track all together as an ensemble. And then David brought up an unusual idea for creating the vocal. He was kind of famous for writing lyrics by collecting different bits of paper with quotes on them. And we did a corresponding thing as regards writing the top line for the song. When the backing track was done, David said, 'Okay, let's each of us go in the vocal booth and sing how we think the melody should go—just off the tops of our heads—and we'll compile a vocal out of that.' And that's what we did. Some of the original bits even made it onto the record. Freddie going 'b-b-b-boom ba,' that scat singing stuff, was part of the initial track he went in and did off the top of his head. Odd, isn't it? That's why the words are so curious—some of them, anyway. There was a point where somebody had to take control, and I think it's fair to say that David took the reins and decided that he wanted to rationalize the lyrics and make them say what he felt they should say."

With the success of "Radio Ga-Ga" in 1984, Roger Taylor became the fourth and final member of Queen to write a hit single for the band, although he'd been

NEIL ZLOZOWER

active and important as a songwriter all along, contributing such indispensable album tracks as "I'm in Love with My Car" and "Sheer Heart Attack." With four highly capable songsmiths in the band, getting material onto a Queen album was never an easy matter.

"We fought like cats and dogs," says May. "That's the truth. We were like four painters all trying to get our brushes onto the picture and falling over each other really. It was a constant state of flux. There were times when all our ideas would really work together magically well, and you'd have a great day in the studio where everybody felt they'd contributed. And then there'd be days when everybody was pulling in opposite directions. That would be very painful. And oddly enough, Freddie—who everyone thinks was the great prima donna—was very often the person who would find the compromise. He was very good at mediating like that."

Helping propel "Radio Ga-Ga" to the top of the charts was another landmark video. Veteran rock vid director David Mallet used computer imaging to insert the members of Queen into footage taken from the aforementioned film *Metropolis*. Back in 1984, such high-tech wizardry was very new to the public, as was the idea of rock videos that incorporate scenes from feature films. As with "Bohemian Rhapsody," Queen had anticipated a visual trend. On the whole, May considers Mallet to be the best of the many video directors with whom Queen collaborated.

"The 'Ga-Ga' thing was a tri-

Santa Monica Civic Auditorium, 1975

umph. The videos always came out better when the creative process started with all of us in a room at one time, hammering out the ideas. You need a lot of creative input at the beginning for the thing to become a good video. And you need someone like David who is technically beyond reproach, who can carry the ideas out and put his own creativity in."

There is reason to believe that Queen would have made the transition from the Eighties to the Nineties just as easily as they'd segued from the Seventies into the Eighties. They were prevented from doing so by what turned out to be the first in a series of sad losses that the rock community suffered in the following decade. On November 24, 1991, Freddie Mercury died of AIDS-related bronchial pneumonia. Grief-stricken but determined to move forward, the surviving members of Queen later went into the studio to complete the album they'd been working on at the time of Mercury's death. This became *Made in Heaven*, the final studio album in the Queen opus.

"It was very difficult to do," says May. "But we had promised Freddie we would finish up the tracks."

The Queen legend has continued to grow in the years since Mercury's passing. The 1992 feature film *Wayne's World* touched off a whole new wave of Queen mania by including "Bohemian Rhapsody" in the soundtrack, bringing Queen to a new generation of fans who hadn't even been born when the band's first records came out. Over the years, there have been numerous tributes to Mercury and Queen, and the band's back catalog continues to sell in substantial numbers.

One of the most recent, and successful, Queen-related works is the stage musical *We Will Rock You*, currently a hit on London's West End.

"The musical is just breaking every record," says May. "I can't believe it. Monday nights are packed now. It's a big theater [*the Dominion*], like, 2,300 seats. To have them packed on a Saturday night is great, but to have them packed every night of the week is outrageous. To see people go away happy night after night is a dream come true."

Mercury onstage, 1978

According to May, the idea to do a Queen-related play "goes back about nine years. It started almost as a joke: 'We'll do a musical next!' But our manager, Jim Beach, kept the flame alive. We looked at various different scripts and ideas, but none of them rang true—particularly the biographical material. We found that very uncomfortable. We felt we weren't ready to have the story of our lives, or Freddie's life, on the stage. And although many of the scripts were good—and they may get used one day—they were not right for the moment. And then Ben Elton came up with the idea for 'We Will Rock You.' We jumped at it."

A popular British stage- and screenwriter, Elton devised a story that takes place 300 years in the future. It weaves Queen songs into a plot about a global corporation stifling human creativity. May and Taylor served as the play's music supervisors.

"FREDDIE WAS VERY OFTEN THE PERSON WHO WOULD FIND THE COMPROMISE. HE WAS VERY GOOD AT MEDIATING LIKE THAT."
—BRIAN MAY

"It's funny," says May of the play. "And it's thought provoking. It took our music into the future, almost by definition, at a stroke. Ben is an incredibly fertile creative machine. He basically went away and wrote it in a night, having run the idea by us. But we worked on it a solid year, of which five months was in the theater working with the actors. It was one of the most creatively challenging periods in my life."

May adds that there are plans to open the play in Melbourne, Australia, next year and eventually to bring the show to Canada and the United States as well. "We've had an offer from Las Vegas," he says. "We would like to go on and do the rock and roll towns: Detroit, Cleveland, etc. And we would like to be on Broadway in 2005. It sounds very ambitious, but you gotta think big."

Conspicuous in his absence from the latest flurry of Queen activities, however, is John Deacon. "John is a very private person these days," says May. "He keeps a low profile. It took awhile to get used to, but we have to respect that. He's not in any way negative about what Roger and I are doing. It would be upsetting if he were. But, for instance, he came down and saw the musical when it opened in London and he thoroughly enjoyed it. He said it was great. But he just quietly didn't want to be part of its creation process."

It will be interesting to see whether Deacon comes out of seclusion for Queen's 30th anniversary next year. But whether he does or not, May and Taylor seem to have plenty on tap.

"We're in the midst of planning a lot of stuff. There will be the *Greatest Video Hits II* DVD. And we're talking about a sequel to the musical. That's never been done, but we've only used half of Queen's hit songs in the first musical, let alone some of the other tracks. Ben has a great idea for a new show, which is even more intriguing than the first one. So that's a possibility. I just think life is going to keep on being very busy." ■

MERCURY/PHOENIX TRUST/CAMERA PRESS/RETNA

So, so you think you can tell
Heaven from hell
Blue skies from pain

– written on a 12-string model bought on a Manhattan street, 1972

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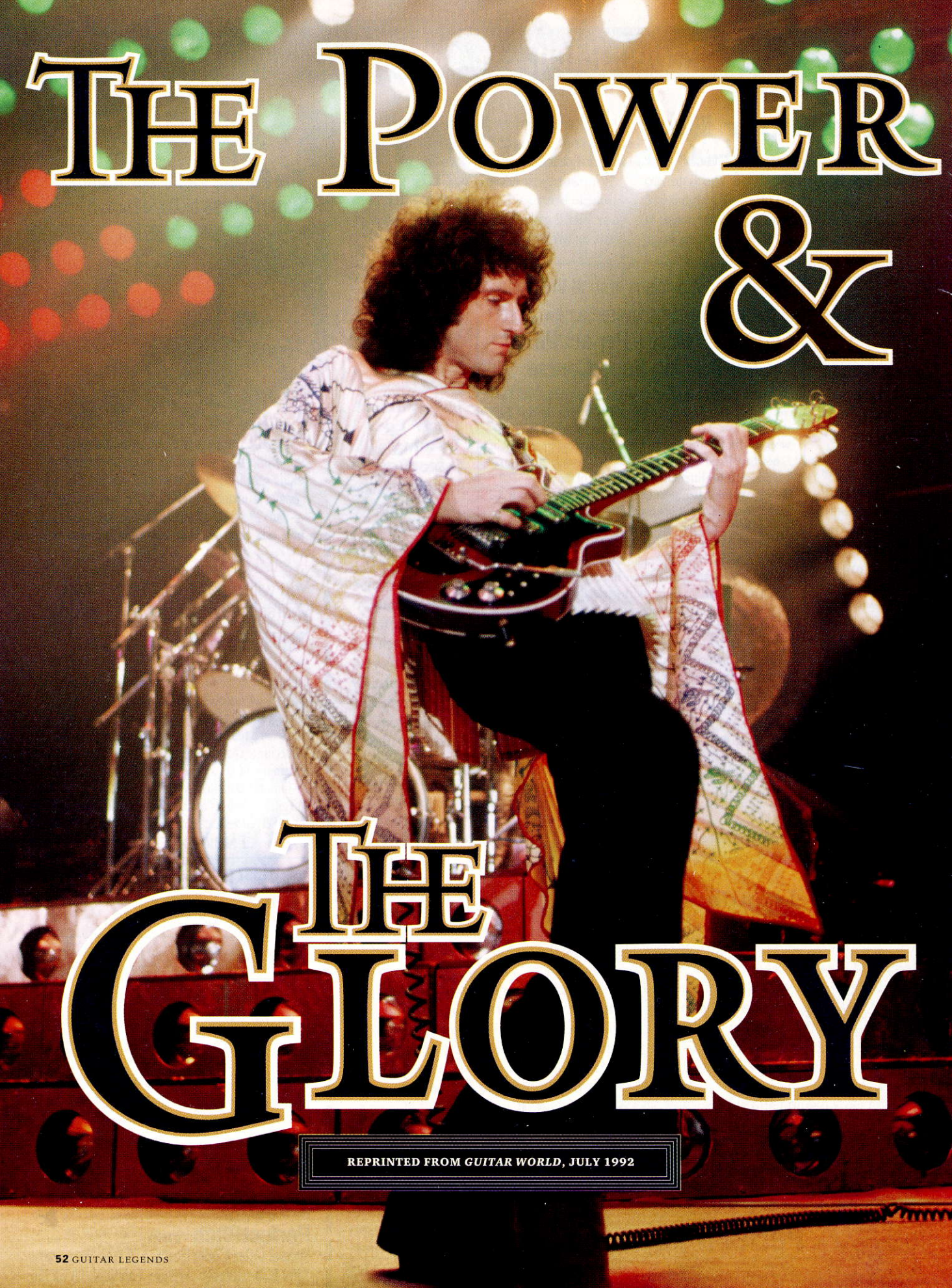


THE POWER & THE GLORY

REPRINTED FROM *GUITAR WORLD*, JULY 1992

HE'S NOT A GUITARIST—HE'S A ONE-MAN ORCHESTRA. JOIN US AS WE CELEBRATE THE ELABORATE ARRANGEMENTS AND SOPHISTICATED CHORD PROGRESSIONS THAT MAKE UP BRIAN MAY'S GUITAR WALL OF SOUND.

By Jimmy Brown

QUEEN'S UNIQUE brand of rock and roll married elements from a broad range of musical genres, particularly heavy metal, classical, English folk, French cabaret and American blues, R&B and gospel. Freddie Mercury's powerful vocals, Brian May's violinlike guitar leads and John Deacon and Roger Taylor's bombastic, rhythm-section orchestrations made for one of the most successful and celebrated rock bands of all time, both artistically and commercially.

Like fellow British supergroups the Beatles, Led Zeppelin, Pink Floyd and Yes, Queen epitomized the rock-band ideal. It was the brainchild of four extremely talented, creative and well-educated musicians who collaborated to produce a prolific output of well-written songs that often featured elaborate ensemble arrangements, sophisticated chord progressions and modulations, rich vocal harmonies and stark dynamic and textural contrasts. All four band members contributed songs, and each was a multi-instrumentalist: May doubled on vocals, piano, harp, ukulele and banjo; Deacon on electric piano, guitar and acoustic double bass; Mercury on piano and guitar; and Taylor on guitar, bass and (remarkably high) falsetto vocals.

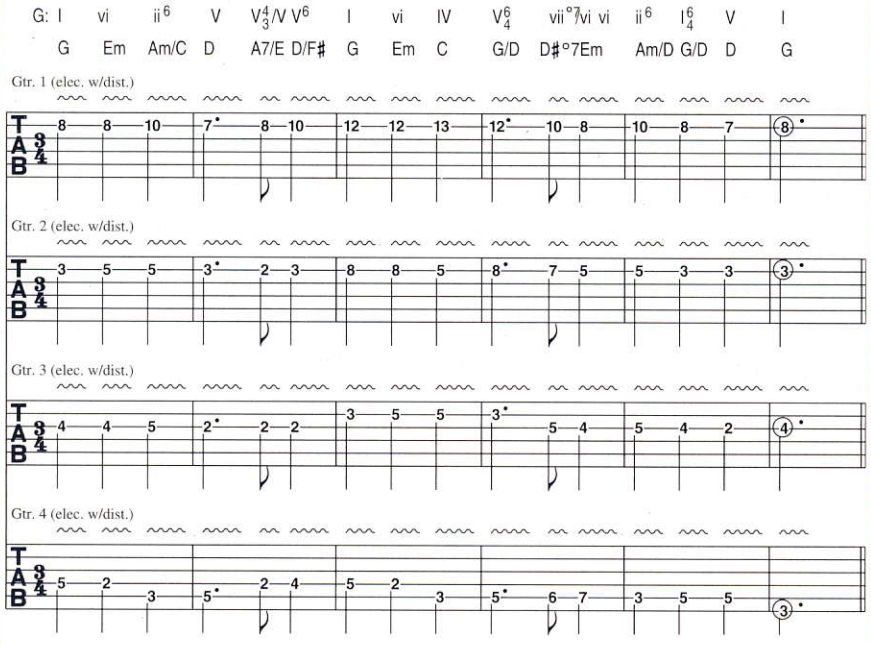
More than a strong lead vocalist and dynamic front man, Mercury was also an accomplished pianist whose grasp of classical harmony was far ahead of most of his rock and roll peers. "Bohemian Rhapsody," probably his greatest songwriting effort, features just about every trick in the music theory book: pandiatonic harmony, pivot-chord modulations, inverted, "borrowed" and "mutated" chords, secondary-dominant cadences, diminished and chromatic passing chords, melodic sequencing, imitative counterpoint...and more.

FIGURE 1 "Bohemian Rhapsody" composite chord changes at (4:55) (piano, guitar and vocal harmony arranged for solo guitar)

At six minutes in length, "Rhapsody" is a masterpiece of composition, studio production and arrangement. The song features many stylistic twists and turns, from elegant, Romantic-style piano accompaniment to driving, octave-doubled power-trio riffs to grand, orchestral interludes and operatic fanfares. **FIGURE 1** presents a harmonic sketch of the song's final section, beginning at 4:55. I've adapted the basic chord progression for guitar. Note the frequent use of modulation (key changing) and inversion (stacking the notes of a chord so that the third, fifth or seventh—rather than the root—serves as the bass note).

NEAL PRESTON/CORBIS

FIGURE 2 "God Save the Queen" excerpt



Queen's strong American R&B and gospel influences are evident in the band's use of call-and-response vocal phrasing, as heard in "Liar" and "Somebody to Love," and repeated choir chanting, the most well-known examples being "We Will Rock You" and "I Want it All." One of the band's biggest singles, "Another One Bites the Dust," features Mercury's soulful, melismatic vocalizing over a repeated two-bar bass riff, a stylistic trait directly descended from the blues.

When it comes to tone, phrasing and finesse, few rock guitarists are the equal of Brian May. His characteristically dry (no reverb), warm, tube-driven, single-coil sound has a commanding, in-your-face presence reminiscent of Jimi Hendrix's. May was the fire behind Queen's rock and roll engine, his meaty riffs, soaring vibrato-intensive solos and harmonized lead-guitar "choirs" providing the perfect counterbalance to Mercury's delicate piano interludes.

A former student of astrophysics, May tapped his knowledge of electronics and acoustics to build a 24-fret electric guitar using materials he found around the house: wood from a fireplace, a vibrato bar fabricated from a saddlebag holder and a knitting needle, fretboard inlays from buttons, binding from shelf-stripping, volume knobs from an old radio...He even wound his own pickups!

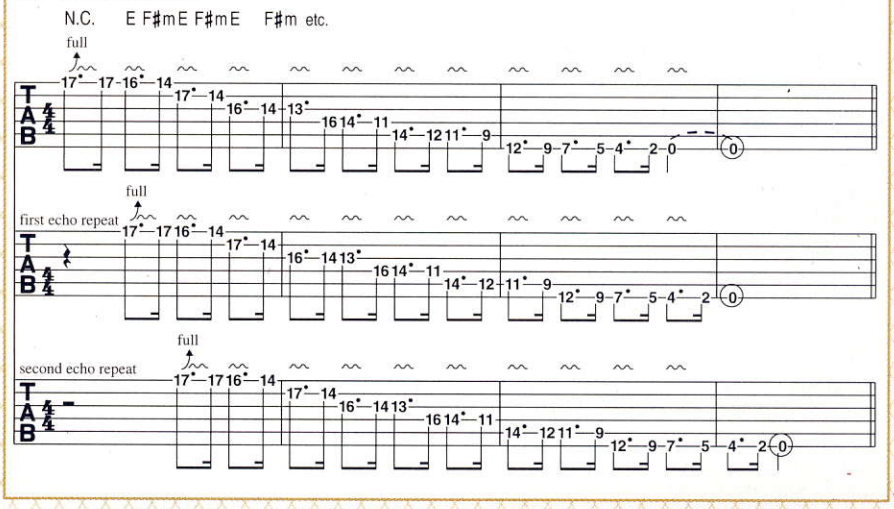
May's distinctive, tubular sound is partially the product of his equipment, especially his pickup and amplifier combination. His guitar houses three single-coil pickups, the wiring of which enables him to use any combination of the three in or out of phase with each other by simply flicking pickup switches. May uses Vox AC30 tube amplifiers for a warm, sustaining, overdriven tone. For added clarity and punch, he kicks in a treble booster, which adds gain to the guitar's signal and enables him to achieve feedback-type sustain, which helps him create expressive, singing licks. For a raspy, metallic attack, May sometimes picks with an English sixpence (a small coin with a serrated edge). To facilitate string bending and vibrato, he uses light-gauge strings.

Like Led Zeppelin's Jimmy Page, May is a master of the recording studio who ingeniously exploits its overdubbing and panning capabilities to fully realize guitar orchestration ideas. His harmonized lead guitar arrangement of the British royal anthem, "God Save the Queen," (familiar to Americans as "My Country 'Tis of Thee") is a perfect example of his refined orchestration and production skills. May layers more than a half dozen single-note lead tracks to create a shimmering, panoramic guitar choir effect that features sweet harmonized bends, elegant trills and a glorious IV-I "Amen" final cadence. **FIGURE 2** depicts the traditional four-part chorale-style harmonization at the beginning of the piece as arranged for four single-note guitars by May. Note the smooth *voice leading* between each chord change (the way the notes in each single-note part or "voice" move from chord to chord) and the consistently bright tone produced by playing each part almost entirely on a single string in the fretboard's lower area.

Though Queen proudly refused to use synthesizers (early on), they did use an Echoplex tape-loop echo unit to create melodic rounds of the "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" variety, and did so ingeniously. In "Now I'm Here" and again in "The Prophet's Song," Mercury employed the device to produce two distinct echo repeats (in stereo) of each note he sang. (He used two Echoplexes in tandem, since the device was monophonic.) The resulting two-repeat echo effect enabled him to layer three-part vocal harmonies by singing along with the lingering echo repeats in real time.

May employed the same effect with his guitar in many of his solos, most notably in his unaccompanied lead cadenza in "Brighton Rock," a solo that he later developed into an extended concert showcase piece. **FIGURE 3**, an excerpt from a 1975 live performance, depicts May's brilliant application of this effect. Using the E major "country" hexatonic scale, often referred to as the Allman Brothers scale (E F# G# A B C#), May plays a descending line in a characteristically English march rhythm

FIGURE 3 "Brighton Rock" live Echoplex solo



Brian May onstage at the Ahoy in Rotterdam, Holland, in 1978

followed by D/A. This cadence can be heard in songs like "We Will Rock You," "It's Late" and "Hammer to Fall," to mention a few. Notice the smoothly satisfying voice leading between the two chords and the inherently rich overtones produced by the open A string. ■

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with heavy vibrato. The echo repeats (indicated in separate staves) create a chain of sweet harmonies in thirds and fourths. Those who own a digital delay unit can replicate this echo orchestration effect by setting the blend control high, with two repeats approximately one second apart. If your unit has stereo outputs, try playing through two amplifiers to create a huge, mind-blowing sound.

Though Queen often ventured far beyond the stylistic parameters of rock, they managed to catch the attention of, and ultimately win over, rock fans from all over the globe, who in turn were musically enlightened and enriched by the band's fresh, eclectic style. As diverse and sophisticated as their music was, however, Queen could also rock out as hard as any heavy metal or hard rock outfit in existence. Songs like "Son and Daughter, "Sweet Lady," "Sheer Heart Attack," "Tie Your Mother Down" and "I Want it All" are about as hard driving as anything by Led Zeppelin, Aerosmith or Van Halen.

"Stone Cold Crazy" is the definitive hard rock guitar song. It has everything, including pumping eighth notes, mammoth power chords, heart-stopping syncopated rhythm section kicks, blistering legato phrases and gut-wrenching whammy-bar dives. The excerpt from the song's guitar solo shown in **FIGURE 4** demonstrates May's grace under pressure at a merciless tempo of 248 beats per minute! Notice the guitarist's impeccable sense of timing (even eighth notes), polished slurring technique (clear hammer-ons and pull-offs), imaginative sense of melodic contour and refined finger vibrato, especially as applied to bent notes (*bend vibrato*).

FIGURE 5 depicts a signature Brian May chord change: an open, single-finger A chord

FIGURE 4 "Stone Cold Crazy" second guitar solo excerpt (1:27)

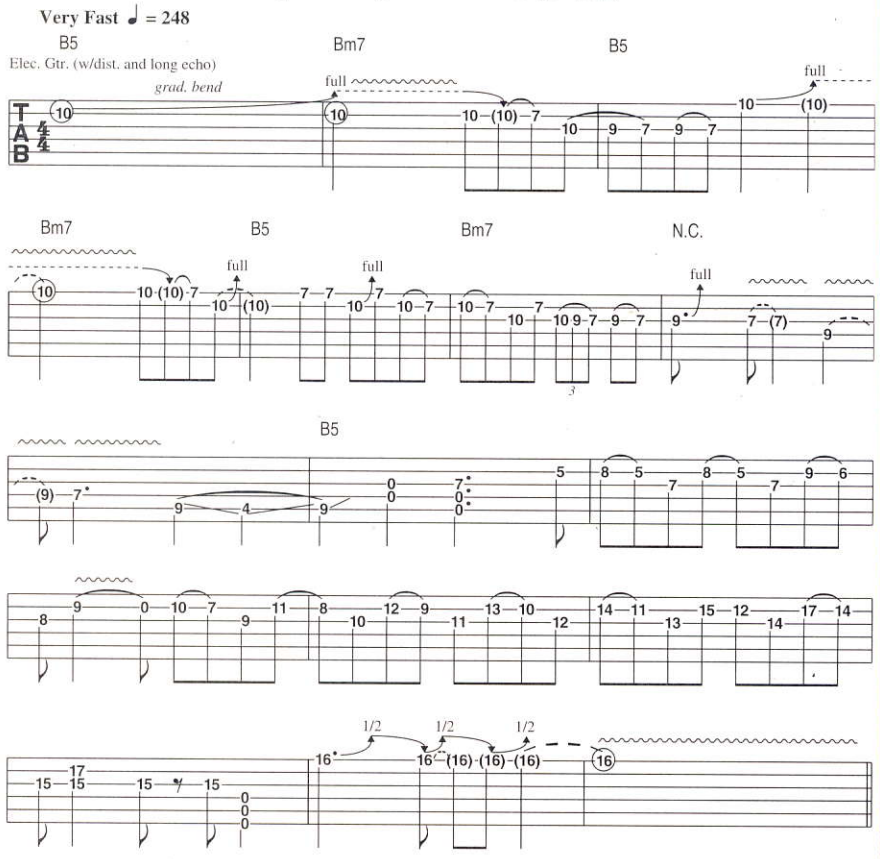
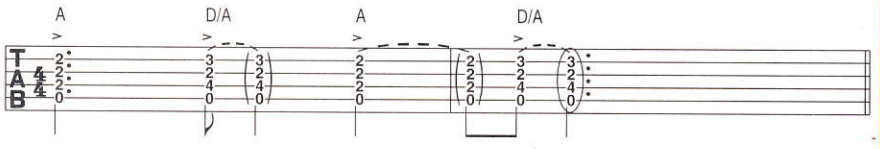


FIGURE 5 signature Brian May chord change



BARRY SCHULTZ/SUNSHINE/RETNA LTD.

WIRE CHOIR

THE SECRETS OF TONE...REVEALED

Since people are always asking me about my sound, I'm going to start this column by telling you about the two main sources of my tone: my homebuilt guitar and my Vox AC30 amp.

When I was young, my obsession with sound led me to build my own guitar. At the time, I thought that many of the recorded guitar tones I heard were "scratchy." I believed that without great tones, guitar notes would just fly past you because their full impact could not be appreciated. But for me to successfully replicate the sounds I heard in my head, it was inevitable that I would build my own guitar.

I can't pinpoint any one thing that gives my homebuilt guitar its distinct sound. While some of it has to do with the pickups, a lot is due to the resonance of the guitar itself. When my dad and I started to build this guitar, I had a specific sound in mind. I knew that I wanted the guitar to be a very "live" instrument, so I tried to design it so that it would feed back through the strings and sustain in a very consonant, singing way. I don't know if it was luck, good guidance or a combination of the two, but it seems to have worked out very well.

The guitar is built of mahogany obtained from an old fireplace. The neck itself is very heavy. It was carved by hand and hasn't moved a fraction of an inch since it was made because it's really thick—almost like a piece of steel. It has a truss rod, but I've never had to adjust it.

I wound the guitar's original pickups by hand. They were quite nice and bright sounding, but since I made them out of available magnets that went north-south-north-south instead of north-north-north-north, it made them unusable when I was bending strings. So I went into the Burns music store in London and bought three off-the-shelf TriSonic pickups. These are built with bar magnets instead of pole pieces, so they have a bit more induction than your regular single-coil Fender-type pickup, resulting in a slightly thicker sound. I still use them to this day.

The only alteration I ever made to the pickups was filling them up with Araldite, a kind of epoxy resin glue. This helped get rid of some of the microphonic squealing (the vibrations that would cause unwanted pickup noise). I remember that the Burns pickups were three guineas (about six dollars) each, making them by far the most costly feature of the guitar!

Though some people think that the secret to my tone is my use of a wah pedal as a tone filter, this is untrue (though I do recall

Between 1998 and 1999, Brian May penned eight exclusive columns for Guitar World. *Here they are in their entirety.*

doing this once on "Mustapha" [*from Queen's 1978* Jazz *album*] to get that "strangled" kind of Eastern sound). Actually, what I do is experiment with different pickup combinations. You see, most switching systems don't take advantage of the range of sound available from a three-pickup configuration. For example, the traditional Fender switch gives you either one pickup at a time or two combinations of two adjacent pickups wired out of phase, but many more combinations are available. And if you consider that you can turn any of the three pickups out of phase, this makes an absolutely cataclysmic difference in the sound.

RICHARD GRAY/COURTESY QUEEN PRODUCTIONS LTD.

I have an on/off switch and a phase-reversal switch for each pickup, so I can easily mix and match every possible pickup combination. My pickups are also wired in series (as opposed to Fender pickups, which are wired in parallel, I believe). If you put two pickups in series with each other and have them wired in phase, you'll get a very warm sound, like a huge humbucker. But if you turn one of them around—that is, change the polarity of the wiring—they will work against each other, canceling out the lower end. Then all you're left with is a beautiful accentuation of the higher harmonics. That's where my trademark "screech" comes from.

For example, on the solo to "Bohemian Rhapsody," I've got the neck pickup working out of phase with the center pickup. In this particular setting, I have the two switches for the neck and middle pickup turned on but the bridge pickup turned off. On top of that, one of the phase switches is clicked up instead of down (it doesn't really matter which one). This setting produces a very sweet harshness.

Another favorite combination of mine is having the neck pickup work out of phase with the bridge pickup (with the middle pickup turned off). This setting enhances much of the top end and accentuates the classic Telecaster-type crunch. I used that tone on the opening riff to "Stone Cold Crazy" as well as on most of the song, and on "We Are the Champions."

"TIE"-TANIC TONE

I think the secret to rock and roll guitar playing is all about hitting an A chord loud. Everything else is secondary. This has been proven to me every time I play "Tie Your Mother Down." The funny thing is, "Tie Your Mother Down" was never a hit. Everybody remembers the song, but it got to about Number 35 on the British charts and went nowhere in America, as far as I know. But whenever things get sticky onstage, I'll begin to play it and the crowd always comes alive. It's a riff guaranteed to save any situation.

I wrote "Tie Your Mother Down" when I was an astronomer doing my research in a tiny observatory on a volcanic ridge. Every morning after we finished observing the heavens, I couldn't go to bed because I was always too wired, so I'd sit outside with a little acoustic guitar and play as the sun came up. Of course, my colleagues all thought I was completely beyond rescue, but I didn't care. That's where I wrote the riff to "Tie Your Mother Down."

I remember bringing the riff back and playing it for Freddie Mercury. He asked what I called it. I said, "'Tie Your Mother Down,' but obviously we can't keep that. We'll have to write something proper." And he said, "No, that's fine! It makes perfect sense to me!" It's like the "Scrambled Eggs" story: "Scrambled Eggs" was Paul McCartney's working title for "Yesterday," but in our case, we stuck with the song's original name.

The song's intro/verse riff, shown in **FIGURE 1**, is built around an open A chord that I barre with my index finger. I start out by hitting the open A string, but I'm not too worried about letting the other notes in the chord ring out sympathetically. Then, with an upstroke, I pick the E note on the D string. Afterwards, I play the C on the A string with my middle finger, bending it up a quartertone or so before pulling off to the open A (that's the Rory Gallagher influence, but more on that later). By the way, I bend the string in toward my palm.

I pick the next note (the higher A on the G string) with an upstroke, and then I repeat the whole sequence. What makes this riff swing is the alternating of the upstrokes on the D and G strings.

The chords following the riff are fairly common voicings. The nice thing with this progression is that you can "rock around the ring finger." In other words, you can keep your ring finger anchored on the B string for the duration of the measure while changing chords.

In my opinion, chords of this type don't sound any better than on a Vox AC30 amplifier. Like most guitarists, I started out playing through cheap amps, until I walked into a music store with my homebuilt guitar and a treble booster (that I actually still use) modeled after a RangeMaster. It gives a boost to the signal and takes a little bit off the bottom end and the top end, as well. For the more technically minded readers: it's actually a very simple one-stage germanium capacitor-coupled preamp.

I was trying out a few different amps with little success until I plugged into a Vox AC30. Suddenly, everything came together: my guitar sounded warm and rich, and it had a voice. It still had plenty of articulation, but now it had real depth as well. I was hooked, and to this day, I've never been able to improve on that tone.

You may be wondering what makes an AC30 sound so unique. Well, I'll try to provide a simple explanation. Most guitar amps use Class B power, which entails having two output stages: one working on one half of the amp's load and the other working on the other half. This delivers a lot of power from a small input signal, but it produces distortion that is, to my ears, unpleasant.

The AC30 power stage uses a Class A configuration. In this arrangement, tubes in the

amp are biased halfway up their characteristic, so with a small signal you get a high-fidelity output—an almost perfect reproduction of the signal going in. And as you gradually increase the input signal, it produces a very smooth, rounded distortion, which is, in reality, a rather nice type of compression. It's a very high-quality sound. What makes it especially useful for a guitarist is that you can easily control how distorted your sound will be.

Getting back to "Tie Your Mother Down," the song was inspired by the late Irish blues guitarist Rory Gallagher. It wasn't a tribute per se, but the pull-offs on the A string came from him. Rory was a fantastic player and one of the great gentlemen of rock and roll. He was a hero of mine who later became a friend. The first time I ran into him was in an Indian restaurant in London. At that time those of us in Queen were just kids starting out, with nothing going on except that we loved music. Rory was already a star at this point. We started talking, and he had all the time in the world for us. He was incredibly kind and considerate and gave us all kinds of advice. I never forgot that.

I ran into Rory many times after that throughout the years. Rory loved his guitar and his audience but had no aspirations with regard to stardom, fame or fortune. He was nevertheless a unique player who, for some reason, was never really properly captured on record. But when he played live in some smoky club, he could just kill! It's true what they say about the good ones going first.

CREATING HARMONY

Even though I was raised to be a scientist (it was always a given that I would end up being a teacher; if not an astronomer), I think there was always an intuitive person in me screaming to get out. I was used to being very technical and analytical, but there was a side of me that just wanted to make some noise and be instinctive—to let my emotions rule me.

I used to go to school at the Imperial College in London, which was next door to the Royal College of Music. Whenever I bumped into people who were strolling out with their violin cases, I would think, Isn't it strange that they're there and I'm here? I remember having one conversation with a student there. She said that after studying at the college for two years, she was just getting into composition. I asked her what that meant to her and she said, "I don't know what it means." It was obvious that she couldn't take any chances with her work until she was taught the "proper" way to do it.

I thought what she said was very strange, particularly in light of the fact that I felt like music was ready to burst out of me. It struck me that some areas of conventional music education can make someone as technical-minded and uninstinctive as a scientific background can.

Madison Square Garden, 1977

Ironically, it was the fact that I was trained as a scientist that led me to embrace and explore the intuitive, less rigid sphere that music had to offer. And I think Queen were the gateway to that realm for me and probably for my bandmates. (With the exception of Freddie Mercury, everyone else in the band was in the sciences.) So when Queen started out, we felt like we were jumping out into a void with this great belief and arrogance that we had something wonderful to offer.

I never had any formal classical training (though I did take piano lessons for four years, which taught me a lot about harmony and chord construction), but I think that it's better to be analytical *after* composing music than before. That is, it's good to *feel* something first and ask why it worked afterward. I've always found that this approach leads to the best musical results. If you try to map things out mathematically, you'll come up with something serviceable, but you'll probably have missed the magical part that can wrench your stomach.

People often ask me how I came to create my "wall of guitars" sound. I was always into vocal harmonies. I was just fascinated by the way harmonies could build a song up in general, and I loved finding out why all those parts worked with each other. Consequently, I dreamed of doing that with guitars someday. I remember the first time I heard the harmonies in "Maybe Baby" by Buddy Holly and the Crickets—I just freaked! There was something happening to me emotionally that was emanating from the midst of those harmonies that, combined with Buddy Holly's incisive guitar sound, still sends chills up and down my spine.

I was also lucky to be around when the electric guitar was still being developed. The barriers of what could be accomplished on the instrument were being broken almost on

FRANK WHITE

a monthly basis. And once all the modern elements, such as bending strings, using distortion and controlling feedback, became part of everyone's vocabulary, the electric guitar had evolved into a phenomenal instrument. I thought if you could have an orchestra full of these kinds of instruments, what incredible emotion you could create!

When I was finally able to realize my approach to harmonizing guitar parts, it was a dream come true. As I was recording the first few Queen albums, I remember thinking, I will put as much emotion as I can muster into every single part, and then it's bound to add up to something very powerful.

As far as arranging the guitar harmonies, it wasn't that difficult—I was always able to hear in my head what was going to work. As a result, my guitar orchestrations were mostly intuitive and created on the spot, such as the harmonized solos in "Keep Yourself Alive." It was afterward that I actually analyzed why a certain arrangement I came up with worked.

On some occasions, though, I did preplan the harmonies. For example, before I tracked the "Killer Queen" solo, I had a very clear idea of what I was going to do, to the extent that I sang the parts into a tape recorder before I entered the studio.

Of course, you must consider many things when harmonizing guitar parts. For example, you can't just play parallel thirds or fifths and expect anything great to happen, 'cause it'll just sound like treacle. You have to be able to harmonize *diatonically*, that is, playing intervals (such as thirds, fifths or sixths) that occur naturally within the key in which you're playing. You should also be aware that harmonies can go "outside" (into dissonance) and then return back "inside" again or they can weave in and out of each other. The possibilities are endless.

I usually arrange my harmonies using the major, Dorian or Mixolydian scales. **FIGURES 2–4** show these scales harmonized in thirds, both in position and up the neck on two strings. Learning these examples will give you a good foundation for understanding my thought processes when I harmonize my guitar parts and help guide you as you experiment with your own harmonized lead lines.

BORROWING THE "KILLER" SOLO

Whenever guitarists tell me, "Brian, I've ripped you off on this solo," I reply with disbelief, "Oh? Really?" That's because I usually don't hear myself in what they play. I think the beauty of music is that no matter how much you listen to and try to copy someone else, your own "voice" still comes through.

For example, my solo on "Killer Queen" (*Sheer Heart Attack*) was my conscious attempt to recreate a certain type of bell-like effect I heard in Mantovani's music. For those of you who don't know who Mantovani was, he was a bandleader who recorded instrumental "mood" music—kind of like "make out music" for my parents' generation. It was Mantovani who came up with what has been called the "cascading strings" sound. I first heard him do this shimmering bell-like effect using strings on "Charmaine," one of his huge hits, and was incredibly intrigued by its sound.

There also was a group called the Temperance Seven (they were a British Dixieland-revival jazz band, but with very structured arrangements) that did the same cascading thing with horns. In this band, the clarinet, trumpet and trombone played harmonies in succession, creating a chiming, bell-like effect. And inevitably I thought, "Wouldn't it be brilliant to create the same sounds with guitars?"

The solo to "Killer Queen" is the result of this thought process. I wrote out the second half of the solo—the part featuring the cascading guitars (starting at 1:39 on the recording)—for you in **FIGURE 5**. Notice that the first guitar starts out playing a single-note line, and then when it gets to the harmony point (in bar 5), a second guitar plays a note that answers the first guitar *and* sustains into the third guitar's note. Then, before the third guitar's note has a chance to decay, the first guitar starts the cycle all over again. This creates an effect (at least to my ears), similar to three bells playing in succession and building a three-part harmony, with each note sustaining into another.

Though it sounds like the notes are being panned on the record, the three guitars were actually "positioned" in different places spatially during the mix. I also made sure that the notes were played in a specific sequence so that it *seemed* like they were being panned.

The broader lesson to be learned in all this is that the music you create is inevitably going to be a product of your collective

FIGURE 1 "Tie Your Mother Down" intro/verse riff

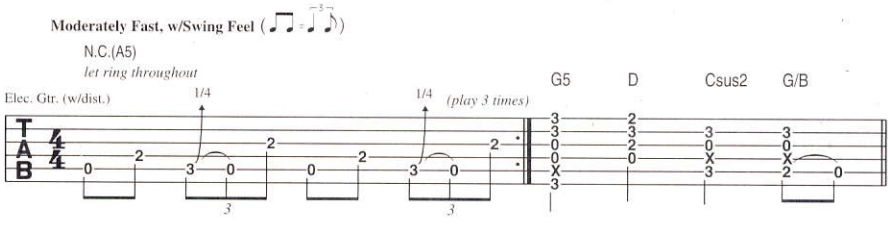


FIGURE 2 A major scale (A B C♯ D E F♯ G♯) harmonized in thirds

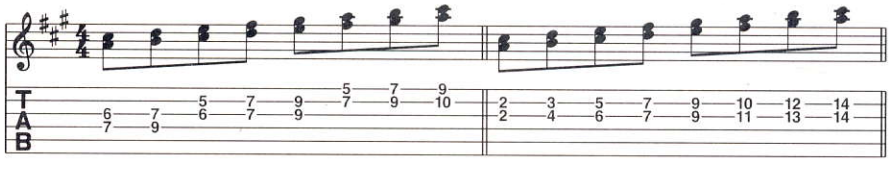


FIGURE 3 A Dorian mode (A B C D E F♯ G) harmonized in thirds

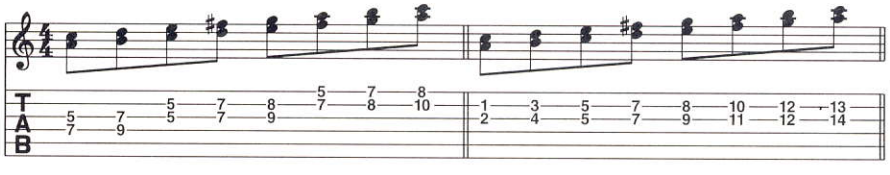
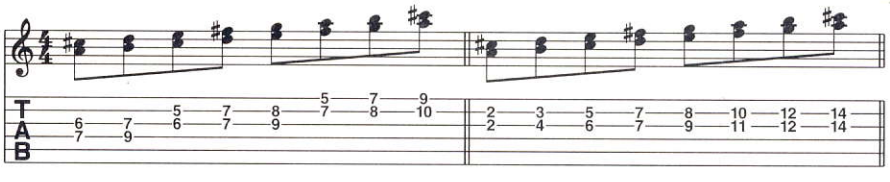


FIGURE 4 A Mixolydian mode (A B C♯ D E F♯ G) harmonized in thirds



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listening experience. There's nothing to be ashamed of when you listen to other musicians and then do your own take on their styles (though I wonder how Mantovani would feel if he heard "Killer Queen"). That's what conversation is about, and it sure is what guitar playing is about.

KEEP YOUR RIFFS ALIVE

I often get asked how I came to layer all those guitar parts on the "Keep Yourself Alive" solo. The answer is that, like Pinocchio's nose, it just grew and grew and grew. Here's the full story: before Queen had a record contract, we made a demo of "Keep Yourself Alive" (in fact, it's still my favorite version of the song). This was the first time I had an opportunity to play a three-part harmony solo, so I did it with relish. I employed my favorite pickup combination (the one I use about 85 percent of the time)—the bridge pickup in conjunction with the center pickup, in phase—to get that rich, saturated distortion. And even though the solo was largely instinctive—that is, it was not written out beforehand—it worked out well.

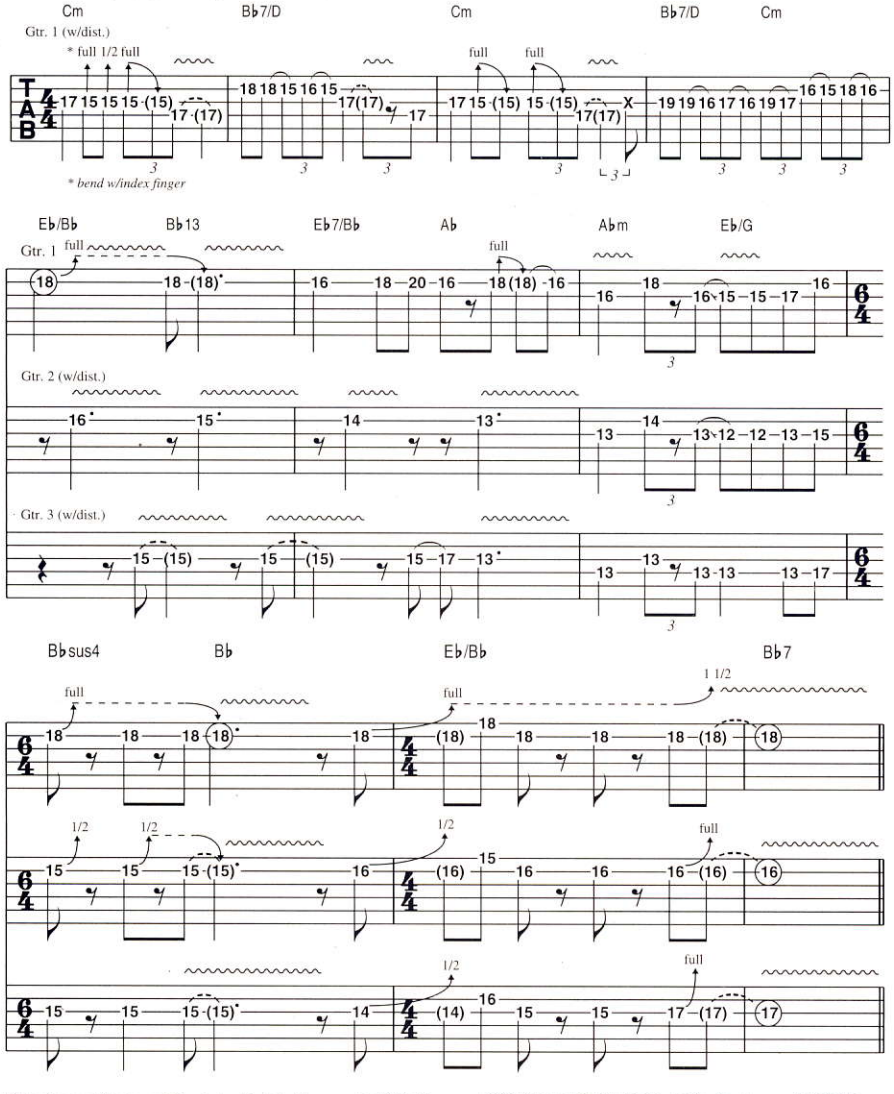
The solo sounded so good that I thought I'd simply play it again when we got to do the final version of the song. Unfortunately, it is seldom possible to reproduce great moments in the studio. After agonizing over the solo and never being satisfied with it, I realized that it should be different from, rather than a copy of, the previous version. That led me to think that I should take the original solo even further by adding more harmonies, but with a twist.

On a lark, I slowed the tape to half speed and proceeded to layer more parts throughout the solo (and elsewhere in the song). When those parts were played back at normal speed, they sounded an octave higher, which added a top-end sparkle and provided a nice counterpoint to the main three-part solo depicted in **FIGURE 6**. **FIGURE 7** shows the sped-up harmonies that I overlaid in the second half of the solo.

Speeding up the tape was a trick that I used on other Queen songs as well. For example, on "Now I'm Here" (*Sheer Heart Attack*), you can hear high bent A notes over the A chord (after the verses). These notes were also sped up (either a fifth or an octave—I don't quite recall which) by slowing the tape down while recording them, then playing everything back at the original speed.

There's nothing quite like analog tape manipulation. The beauty of analog recording gear was that you could do so much with it. In addition to slowing the tape, you could turn it over and record guitar parts that would sound backward when the tape was played properly. Of course, digital recording units don't let you do that, and you have to specifically dial in the effects you want. The process is fast, clean and efficient, but I miss the flexibility and the "you never know what to expect" quality that analog gear provided.

FIGURE 5 "Killer Queen" guitar solo (1:39)



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ECHOES FROM THE PAST

Although harmonizing lead lines in the studio was fun and produced great sounds, it created a problem when it came time to replicate the parts onstage. Employing two other guitarists was impractical, and electronic harmonizers hadn't been invented yet.

While searching for a solution, I started fooling around with a Maestro Echoplex, which is an analog-tape-delay unit that came out in the late Sixties. I discovered that by turning the Echoplex's regeneration control all the way down (thereby producing just a single echo or return), I could create a part to which I could play harmony. I realized that if I had two Echoplexes with equally spaced delay times—one twice as long as the other—I could momentarily produce a three-part harmony.

Unfortunately, I also discovered that the stock Echoplex don't create delays long enough for my needs, so I had to modify the machine so that the playback head could be slid farther from the recording head, thereby producing a longer delay time. Now I had something that worked very well, but with one drawback: it was very unreliable. You never knew if the bearings were going to give out at a crucial moment onstage. Nevertheless, I ended up using the Echoplex live for years.

I remember first messing around with

this effect when we were rehearsing. I was going through three little amps, and it was amazing fun! I could create canon- and fuguelike pieces consisting of rhythms played against each other; or I could play a little bit of rhythm and then play some lead on top, and it would sound great. Freddie [*Mercury*] employed the Echoplex rather brilliantly on "The Prophet Song" (*A Night at the Opera*) to create cascading vocal harmonies.

The big secret to making this effect sound good with an overdriven lead guitar is that each signal has to go to its own amplifier. If you route all the signals to the same amp, they'll intermodulate; these conflicting overtones will sound very nasty as soon as you turn up the mix (which you need to do to achieve the optimum effect). To achieve a full-blown, saturated, compressed guitar tone for each guitar part, you have to divert each signal into a different amplifier chain. I'd have my dry guitar signal going to one amp and from there to a splitter that goes to the Echoplexes. The output from the first Echoplex goes into a separate amp, and the output from the second Echoplex, which has twice the delay time, goes to a third amp. With this setup, you can turn all the amps up full and they won't interfere with each other. It creates the sound of three full-blown electric guitars cranking at their full potential.

My solo on "Brighton Rock" (*Sheer Heart Attack*) is one of the most obvious examples of this and is something I turned into a guitar showcase when we performed the song live. That wasn't the first time I used this effect live; I'd already been experimenting with it onstage during my solo in "Son & Daughter" (which we used to play on our first tour, when we supported Mott the Hoople). I was using just one Echoplex at the time, because at that point we just didn't have the technology—or the money—to use two.

When we recorded "Brighton Rock" in the studio I used just one Echoplex for the solo, but when we played it live, I started adding the second Echoplex, enabling me to come up with parts such as the one depicted in **FIGURE 8**. Notice that even though the descending line is simply the E major hexatonic scale (E F# G# A B C#) and the ascending line is the E minor hexatonic scale (E F# G A B D), the *harmonies* that the echoes create are wonderful. Don't be taken aback by the term "hexatonic"—it simply defines a scale that contains six notes (hence the term "hexa"). A simple way to conceptualize the major hexatonic scale is to think of it as being the major scale without the seventh degree. The minor hexatonic scale may be conveniently thought of as being the five-note minor pentatonic scale with an added second.

All this scale theory is good to know, but I certainly wasn't thinking about it when I played the solo. I was just trying out different things at the time and ended up playing whatever sounded good to me. I'm just glad others thought it sounded good, too.

SPREAD 'EM (TRIADS, THAT IS)

I strongly believe great hooks and catchy chord progressions are important. Many people associate my sound with my harmonized lead lines, but playing interesting lines is only part of the equation. Even a great guitar solo will be superfluous if it doesn't work within the song's framework. To me, an interesting chord progression creates as powerful an impact as a good solo.

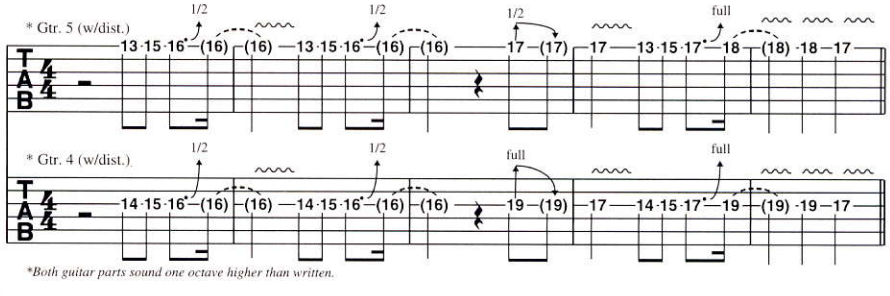
One way I try to make my songs more interesting is to use chord voicings that aren't your typical "grips." Though I often play stock power chords (voiced root-fifth-root octave) in Queen's heavier songs, in many instances those voicings don't provide the kind of voice-leading or harmonic function that I'm looking for when I'm playing a slower, or more complex, tune.

One way I stretch out my voicings is by playing three-note "spread" triads instead of barre chords. The beauty of these open voicings is that they're easy to play, yet they sound quite distinct. You can look at them as reductions or outlines of the barre chord shapes most of you are already familiar with.

For example, the E chord depicted in **FIGURE 9** is pretty common—a staple in rock music. Here's how I make it sound interesting:

FIGURE 6 "Keep Yourself Alive" harmonized guitar solo

FIGURE 7 sped-up harmonies overdubbed over last five bars of solo



*Both guitar parts sound one octave higher than written.

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I simply omit the root octave found on the G string. I finger the chord with the root (E) on the A string, the fifth (B) on the D string, and the third (G#) on the B string, as shown in **FIGURE 10**. Notice my fingering—I don't use a barre; instead, I use my index finger, ring finger and pinkie to fret the chord. It's still an E chord; it just sounds brighter and more "open" without the octave doubled E root note in the middle.

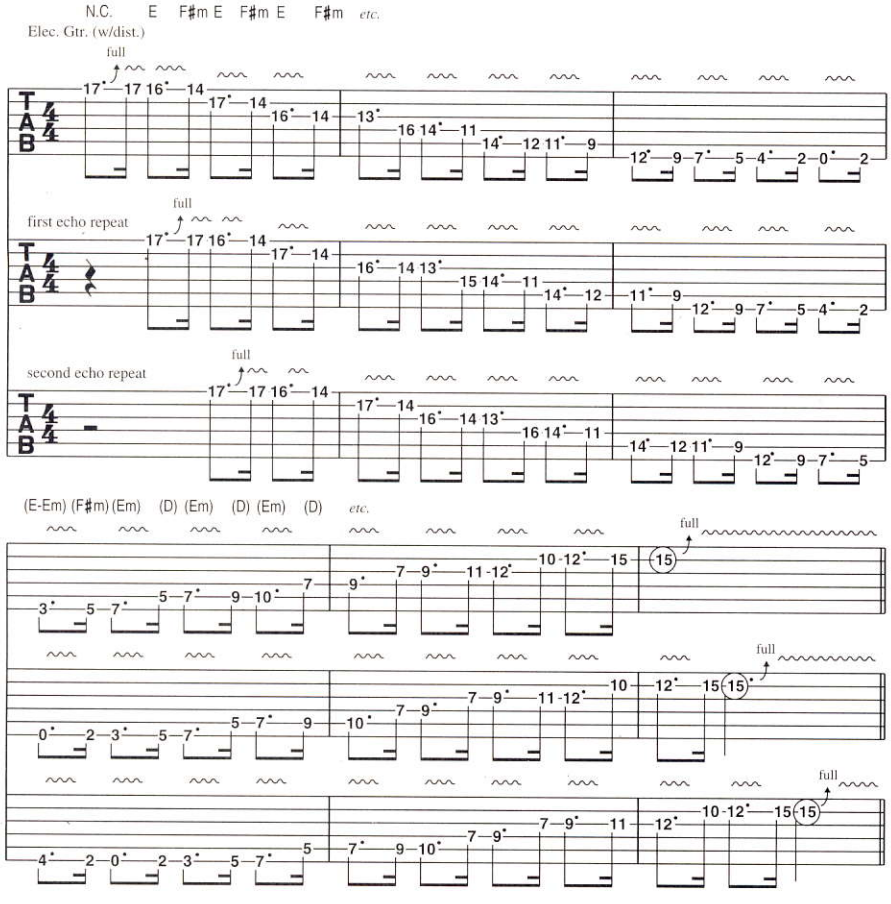
To apply this approach to a minor triad, all you have to do is lower the third by a half step. Look at the Em voicing shown in **FIGURE 11**. Again, notice that I don't play the root octave on the G string; instead, I fret the root (E), fifth (B) and minor third (G) with the tips of my index, ring and middle fingers, respectively.

Once you get these fingerings down, the next step is to learn *inversions* of the major and minor triads using this spread-voicing principle. Placing the third of each chord in the bass produces the lovely E and Em voicings shown in **FIGURE 12**, while voicing the fifths in the bass gives you the voicings found in **FIGURE 13**. Ideally, you should be able to play these spread inversions up and down the neck. **FIGURE 14** depicts the three inversions of the E major triad played in succession, and **FIGURE 15** covers the three inversions of the E minor chord.

Once you have these chord grips under your fingers, try to play different progressions with them. By the way, these shapes lend themselves quite well to *voice leading*—that is, the process of smoothly connecting successive chords to each other. It's always good when changing chords to keep in mind that each note or voice ideally should move no more than a whole step up or down. For example, if you look at the I-V-IV-I progression (in the key of E) depicted in **FIGURE 16**, you'll notice that when I switch from E to B, the B note stays the same while the E note moves down a half-step to D# and the G# moves down a whole step to F#. You can hear how logically consonant this cadence sounds.

I've used this chordal approach in Queen's music as a way to sound full, yet remain out of the way of the other instruments. To get you started playing these types of voicings, I've written out a rhythm guitar arrangement (similar to what Freddie Mercury played on the piano) to the verses of "Doing All Right" (*Queen*), using inversions of spread triads (see **FIGURE 17**). Even though I didn't play this arrangement on the record—I mostly played fills—I think it captures the essence of the song, and I'd feel very comfortable playing it. The low E string is pedaled throughout most of the verse (this approximates Freddie's part), but notice how seamlessly all the chords connect to each other.

FIGURE 8 "Brighton Rock" solo excerpt (live version)



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CHORDS WITH MOVING BASS LINES

When I play chords that only have two or three notes, I try to underscore the harmony of the given progression by using a type of chord movement called *oblique motion*, wherein one note, or more, remains stationary or constant while another note or group of notes moves up or down. Notes that remain constant are called *common tones*, as they are common to all the chords.

FIGURE 18 shows how I use this approach in "Now I'm Here." As you can see, I start the song off by holding down an open D_5 chord shape (as opposed to the fifth-position D_5) while picking a steady eighth-note rhythm with downstrokes. I like playing chords near the nut because I feel there's more tonal clarity

ARTHUR EDWARDS/COURTESY QUEEN PRODUCTIONS LTD.

in this area of the fretboard. I think chords start to sound muddier as you move them up the neck, especially when you use a lot of distortion on your amp.

From here on, my fingering gets a little eccentric. Here's what I do (of course, you should use whatever fingerings are most comfortable to you): right off the bat, I sneak my left thumb over the top of the neck to gently mute the low E string. Then, in order to play the Csus2 chord, I use my middle finger to grab the C note on the A string, while still holding down the D on the B string. At the same time, my pinkie sneaks over and frets the G on the high E string. I don't actually play this note when I strum the Csus2 chord; it's just there as an anchor (and as G is the fifth of C, I know it won't sound bad if I pick it accidentally).

To play G/B, I fret the low B bass note with my index finger while keeping my ring finger on the D. I then slide the index finger down to play the Bb. Meanwhile, for some unexplained reason, my pinkie takes the place of the ring finger to grab the D on the B string (the common tone of the whole progression). I let the open G and D strings ring out, creating a Bb6 sound.

I also rely on oblique motion to voice the chords in the interlude section of "Doing All Right" (*Queen*), wherein I employ a descending diatonic bass line in the key of A to play the D-D/C#-G/B-A progression, while pedaling the D note on the B string. **FIGURE 19** illustrates the chord fingerings I use for that part.

One of the interesting things about using oblique motion is that the common tones take on different harmonic implications with each successive chord in the progression. As you can see in the D-Csus2-G/B-Bb6 progression in "Now I'm Here" (**FIGURE 18**), the D note on the B string functions as the root, second (ninth), fifth and third, respectively. Also notice that using the third of the G chord, B, instead of the root (G) in the descending bass line makes the Csus2-G/B-Bb6 progression sound warm and smoothly connected.

As I mentioned earlier, when I compose riffs or progressions that I want to become signature to a certain song, I prefer to use chord voicings near the nut. I feel that this area of the neck provides chords, as well as single notes, with the greatest power, definition and clarity. In fact, many of Queen's most memorable riffs, like the ones in "Tie Your Mother Down," "Stone Cold Crazy" and "It's Late," are played within the first few frets. One of my favorite low-position riffs is the one that precedes the verse in "Now I'm Here." I've written that one out for you in **FIGURE 20**.

There's a certain heaviness and purity that only comes with playing down low on the neck. Sometimes the essence of rock and roll can be reduced to an open E chord played like you really mean it. ■

FIGURE 9

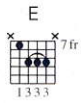


FIGURE 10

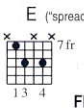


FIGURE 11

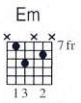


FIGURE 12

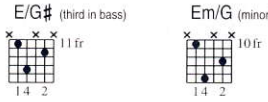


FIGURE 13

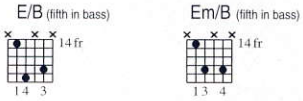


FIGURE 14

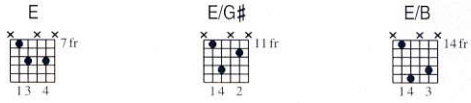


FIGURE 15

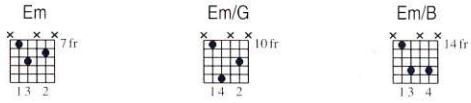


FIGURE 16

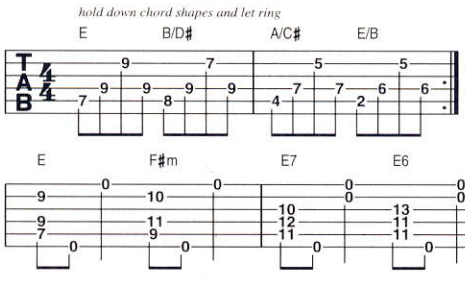


FIGURE 17 "Doing All Right" verse piano chords arr. for gtr.

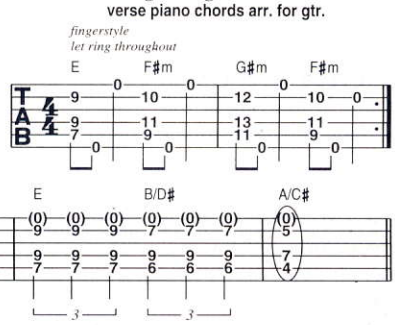


FIGURE 18 "Now I'm Here" intro

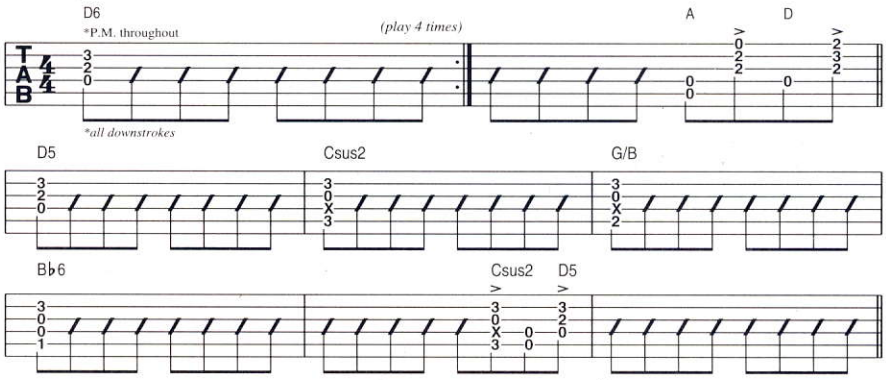


FIGURE 19

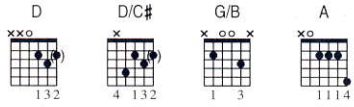
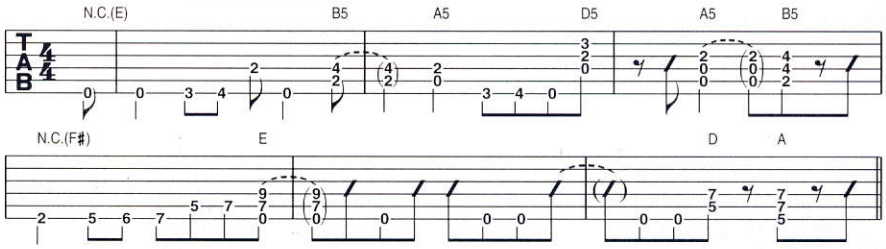


FIGURE 20 "Now I'm Here" riff before verse



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THE ROYAL TREATMENT

How to play Queen's iconic "rock opera" masterpiece, "BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY"

BY ANDY ALEDORT

"BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY," Queen's 1975 smash hit, holds a handful of distinct honors in the annals of classic rock history. The glorious excess and tongue-in-cheek pretentiousness that defines this track has earned it the right to be parodied mercilessly through the years (as Mike Myers did in the hit film *Wayne's World*), and it rivals only Led Zeppelin's "Stairway to Heaven" (also parodied mercilessly in *Wayne's World*) for heavy-rotation honors on classic rock radio.

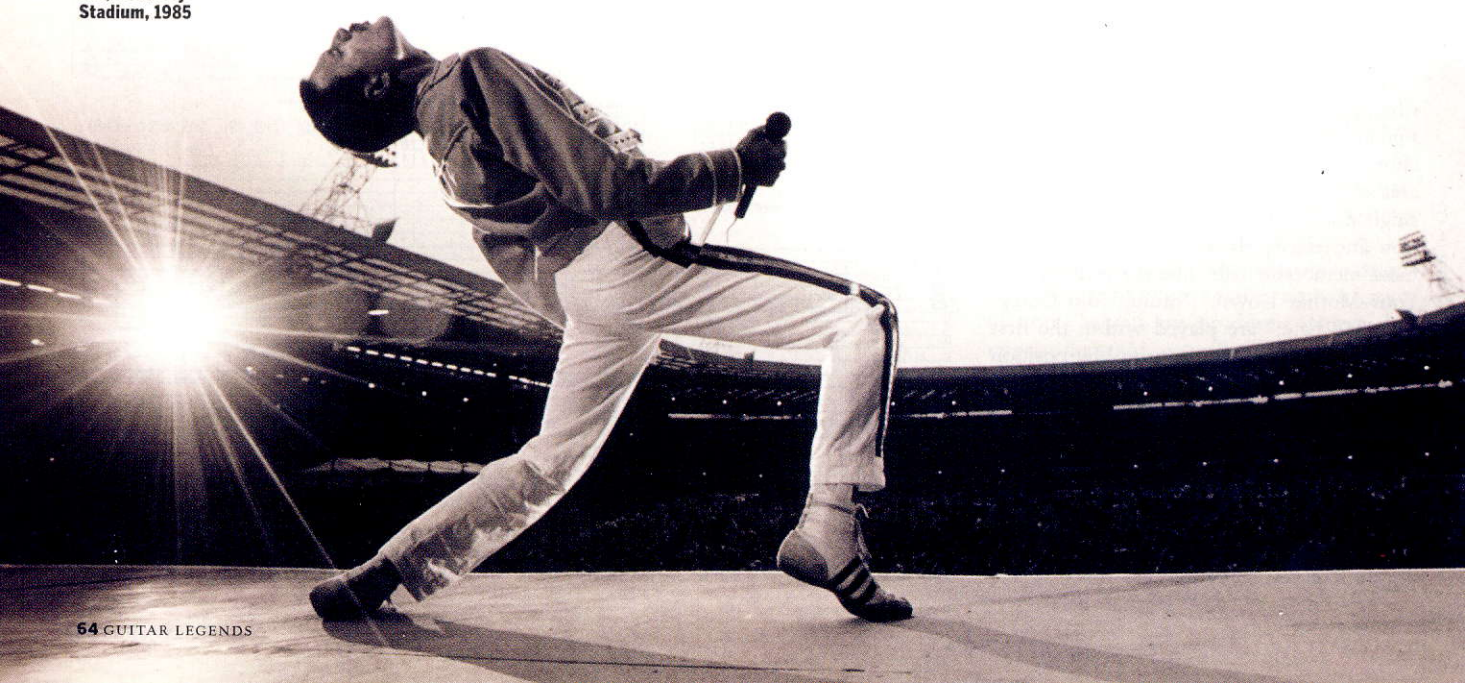
But, like "Stairway," "Bohemian Rhapsody" has earned its honorable distinctions. The song is a masterpiece of composition, lyrics and performance, and no amount of parody could ever diminish the impressive creativity or the raw power that Queen deliver on this timeless jewel of a rock song.

At the time of the release of "Bohemian Rhapsody," rock music was experiencing a renaissance of sorts. Inspired in part by the late-Sixties recordings of the Beatles, which occasionally featured string quartets and orchestras, as well as brass and classical motifs, many British bands were blending rock ad roll with Western classical music. Yes, Genesis, and Emerson, Lake and Palmer were among the leaders of what became in the early Seventies Britain's progressive rock movement.

It's no wonder Queen were drawn to prog-rock; it provided a perfect means of balancing the late-19th-century classic Romantic leanings of singer/songwriter/pianist Freddie Mercury with the British-blues-inflected, sweetly distorted electric guitar sound of Brian May and heavy power-trio attack of May, bassist John Deacon and drummer Roger Taylor.

In our arrangement of "Bohemian Rhapsody" (beginning on page 66), all of Freddie Mercury's piano parts have been meticulously adapted for guitar. Most of the chord voicings fall comfortably on the fretboard, but you will find that some are certainly more unusual, and less comfortable to finger, than others. In bars 1–4, basic chord shapes are sustained through each bar. In bars 5 and 7, the chords are *arpeggiated*, which means that each note in the chord is sounded individually and in succession; in this case, the tones are allowed to sustain into each other. In bar 7, on beat three, barre the ring finger across the G and B strings at the 13th fret in order to sound the two-note chord. Moving smoothly between single notes and *double-stops* in this way may require a bit of practice.

In bars 12–14, five- and six-string chord voicings are held throughout a given bar while single notes and groups of notes are sounded alternately. This type of *voice leading* (the way in which the individual notes of a chord move to those of the following



Mercury at Live Aid, Wembley Stadium, 1985

NEAL PRESTON/RETNA UK/RETNA LTD.

chord) is more common (and more comfortable) on the piano, so playing chords in this fashion on the guitar may feel somewhat foreign to you.

In bar 15, a repeated verse rhythm pattern is established in that: 1) across beats one and two, a full chord is followed by a series of sustained single notes; and 2) across beats three and four, alternating high notes *pivot* against repeated lower notes. This kind of pattern is applied throughout the majority of bars 17–26. Some excellent examples of pianistic voice leading are found in bars 23–25, which contain the chord progression Cm-B+(aug.)-Eb/Bb-Adim7-Abmaj7-Eb/G-Eb-Bb/D. In bar 31, starting on beat three, a series of descending two-note voicings alternate against a repeated high Eb note. These types of "piano" chord voicings sound great on the guitar, so strive to articulate each chord change and arpeggio cleanly and smoothly to achieve the desired effect.

When adapting some of the song's piano parts for the guitar, I found it very useful to incorporate "thumbed" chords, as in bars 24 and 28. "Thumbed" chords are performed by wrapping the left hand's thumb around the topside of the neck in order to fret notes on the low E string. This technique is indicated by the abbreviation "Th." below the tablature. Fretting low notes with the thumb frees up one of the left hand's fingers, which may be used in conjunction with the other three to execute more complex chord voicings and chordal movement.

May in 1975

Mercury in 1976

During the song's second verse, at bar 42, May enters on distorted electric guitar and supplies single-note reinforcement of each of the root notes in the chord progression played by bassist John Deacon. Notice how the guitarist creates a singing, cellolike effect here with May's exquisite application of finger vibrato.

The song then *crescendos* (builds power and volume) leading into the guitar solo section, which begins at bar 47 (section D). May plays his solo over the chord progression first outlined in bars 9–12, the structure of which is based on a *relative major-minor* axis in the key of Eb (Eb-to-Cm), followed by the two-five (ii-V) chord change of Fm to Bb. Over this progression, May plays a highly melodic solo that's based on the Eb major scale (Eb F G Ab Bb C D) and clearly outlines each chord: in the first bar of the solo (meas. 47), over Eb, he accentuates the notes G, Eb and Bb, which are the chord's major third, root and fifth, respectively; in other words, these are the notes of an *Eb major triad*. Over Cm in the next bar, he accentuates C and Eb, the root and minor third of Cm. May then utilizes quick runs based on the Eb major scale for much of the remainder of the solo. When learning to play these fast lines, practice each phrase slowly and try to count it out over a steady quarter-note pulse (tap your foot). Also, listen closely to the recording, focusing on the way in which May accentuates certain notes or portions of each phrase for proper emphasis.

May's climactic guitar solo is followed by an operatic vocal-driven interlude (section E) and a return to a single piano part (arranged for guitar). In the first bar of this section (56), triadic chord shapes are voiced on the D, G and B strings. On the upbeat of beat one into beat two, an A major triad is followed by Adim (A diminished). Notice that, when switching from A to Adim, the note on the D string remains *common* (the same) while the notes on the D and G strings move down one fret. Again, this move may feel a little uncomfortable, as this is an unusual chord change on the guitar. A similar chord movement is found in bars 62 and 63, in this case between Eb and Ebdim.

Bars 66–70 include some very quick chord changes, specifically between Bb, Eb, Bb7 and Eb voicings that alternate in steady 16th notes. A good way to approach this part is to use an index-finger barre for the Eb chord that falls between Bb and Bb7.

At bar 75, there is a change in meter and feel, from straight 4/4 to a rollicking 12/8, which sets up the shift at bar 79 to the heavier next section of the tune. In true power-trio style, May and Deacon double a heavy, hard-rocking single-note line in octaves; this line is based on the Eb major scale in bars 79–81 and F major in bar 82.

At the bridge section (bar 83, rehearsal letter F), May serves up some conventional rock rhythm guitar, combining octave figures (bars 83, 87, 89–90), two-note root-fifth power chords (bars 84, 88, 91), and single-note riffs played in octave-unison with the bass (bars 85–86, 96 and 97).

The band's collective arranging creativity comes to the fore in bar 100 as one electric guitar (Gtr. 1) plays an ascending line based on eighth-note triplets that is doubled by the bass. In bars 101–102, the ascending triplet theme is developed by two overdubbed guitars (Gtrs. 3 and 4), and in bar 103, these two instruments double the triplet line an octave apart. Many of you will most likely attempt to recreate this section on one guitar; the only part that will present a challenge is this octaves-doubled lick. If you feel you have to choose one part or the other, I recommend playing the higher of the two parts.

During the outro (section G), May plays single-note melodies over a chord progression in a manner similar to a five-piece classical string section, as he interweaves lines played on five overdubbed guitars. Guitars 3 and 4 begin the section playing in *counterpoint* (different pitches and rhythms), but by beat three of bar 108 the two guitars play lines in a harmony of *thirds* (either one and one half or two whole steps) and *fourths* (two and one half whole steps) apart. These two parts can easily be replicated on a single guitar. Guitar 2 plays single-note, cellolike lines underneath Guitars 3 and 4. At bar 108, however, three more overdubbed electrics (Gtrs. 5–7) supply a simple harmonized melody. Together, these parts outline triadic chord shapes for each chord in the progression, in a way that recalls Eric Clapton's three-guitar "choir" in the intro to the Cream classic "White Room."

The song then recoils back down to a single piano part (arranged for guitar) in bars 111–116 that is full of beautiful voice leading and arpeggiated chords. At bar 117, May reenters and plays simple, subdued melodic lines that sit right on each chord in the final progression, in a way emulating the role of the "first violin" in a classical concerto. Use a delicate touch with the guitar's volume control rolled down low when playing these solo phrases.

"Bohemian Rhapsody" offers a tremendous challenge to guitarists that wish to recreate the song's grandeur on a single instrument. By following this arrangement, it is both entirely possible and well within the grasp of any intermediate to advanced player. ■

ANDREW PUTLER/REDFERNS/RETNA LTD. (LEFT); FRANK WHITE (RIGHT).

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"BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY"

As heard on ***A Night at the Opera*** (ELEKTRA)

Words and Music by **Freddie Mercury** • Transcribed by **Andy Aledort**

A **Intro** (0:00)

Moderately Slow ♩ = 71

Is this the real life Is this just fantasy Caught in a landslide No escape from reality

*Gtr. 1 Gm7 C7 F7 B♭

1

mf

*Guitar part in bars 1-4 created for this arrangement; band tacet on recording.

Open your eyes Look up to the skies and see I'm just a poor boy (Ooh poor

Gm B♭7 E♭ A♭/E♭ E♭ Cm

Gtr. 1 (piano arr. for gtr.)

let ring throughout

5

*repeat previous chord

I need no sympathy boy) (Because I'm easy come easy go Little high little low)

F B B♭ A B♭ B B♭ A B♭

9

Any way the wind blows doesn't really matter to me To me

(Ooh the wind blows doesn't really matter to me)

E♭ B♭/D C♯°7 F7/C B♭

12 Gtr. 1 (piano arr. for gtr.)

piano arr. for bass

Bass

mp *mf*

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B **1st Verse** (0:55)

Gtr. 1 (piano arr. for gtr.)

Mama just killed a man Put a gun against his head Pulled my

Bb Gm Cm

16

Bass *Bass Fig. 1*

trigger now he's dead Mama life had just begun but now I've gone and thrown it all

F7 Bb Gm Cm B+ Eb/Bb

20

away Mama ooh Didn't mean to make you cry If

A♯ Abmaj7 Eb/G Eb Bb/D Cm Fm E+ Ab/Eb D♯

w/pick and finger *w/pick and fingers*

24

f Th. *end Bass Fig. 1*

I'm not back again this time tomorrow carry on carry on as if nothing really matters

Bb Bb6 Bb7 Eb Bb/D Cm Abm

28

Th.

Eb Ab/Eb Eb Eb° Ebsus$^{2}_{4}$ Bb

31

(repeat previous measure)

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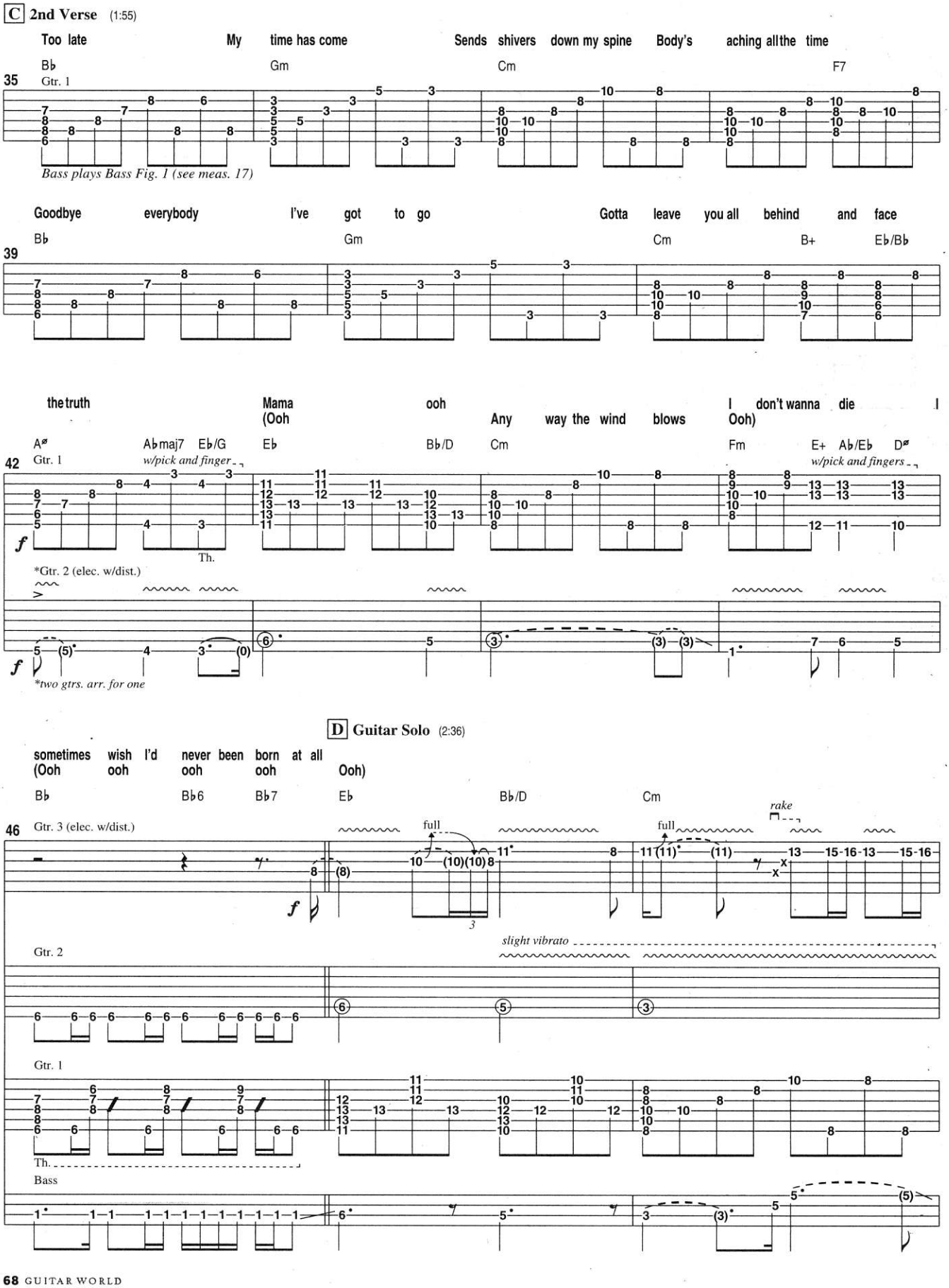

Faster ♩ = 76

E **Interlude** (3:06)

I see a little silhouetto of a man Scaramouch Scaramouch will you do the Fandango

D/A A A° A D/A A A° A D/A A D/A A A° A D/A A

A

*Gtr. 3

55

Gtr. 2

*Gtr. 3 plays top note.

Gtr. 1

sim.

Bass

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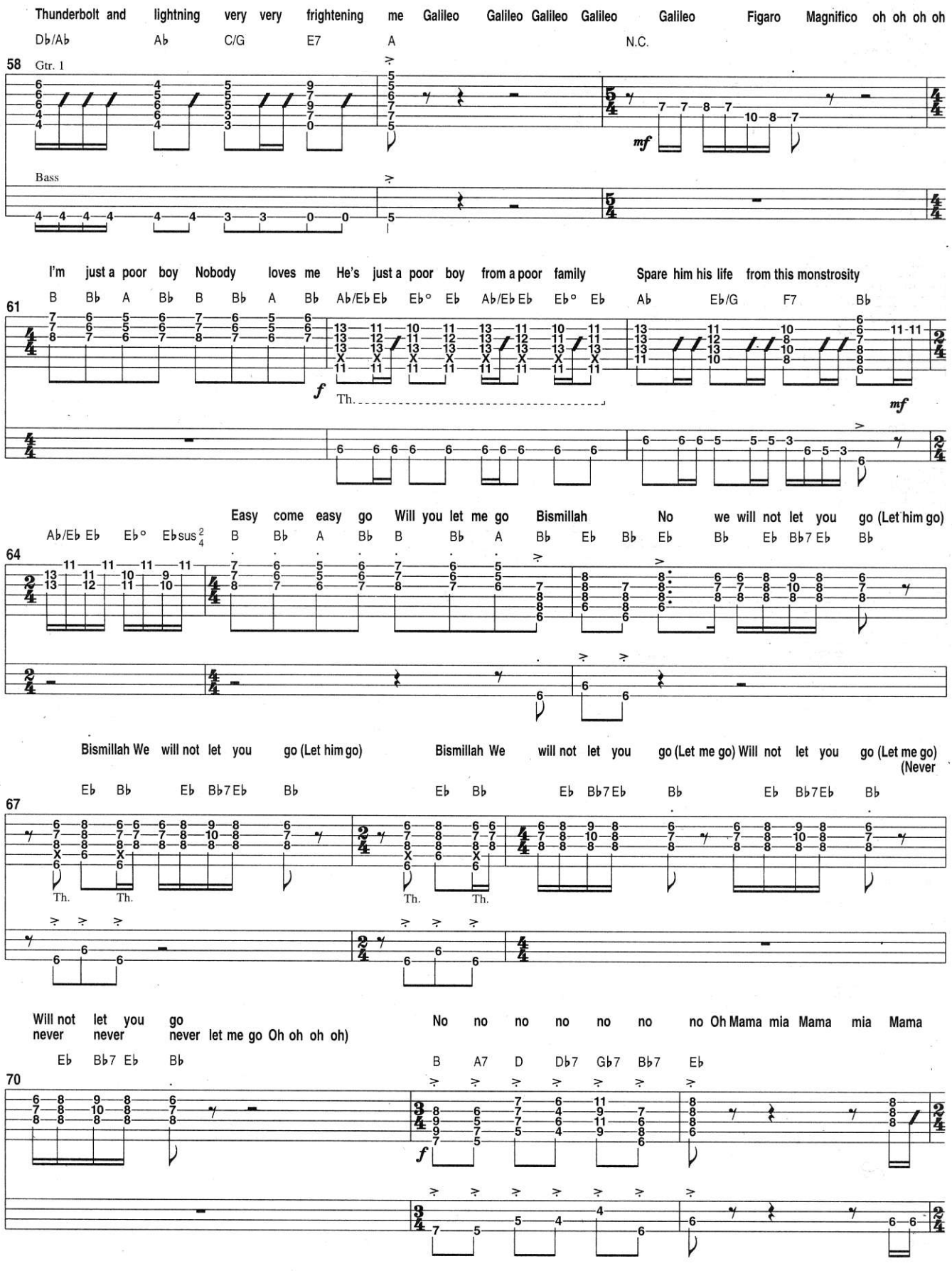

Faster ♩. = 138 (4:01)
mia let me go Beelzebub has a devil put aside for me for
Ab Eb Bb Eb Ab D7 Gm Bb5
73
Gtr. 2
p
mf
me for me
76
Gtr. 2
mp
f
Bass
f
(4:08)
N.C.(Eb)
79
P.M.
P.M.
F Bridge (4:15)
So you think you can stone me and spit in my
(F)
N.C.(Bb5)
Eb5
82
eye
So you think you can
N.C.(Bb5)
(Db5)
(Bb5)
85

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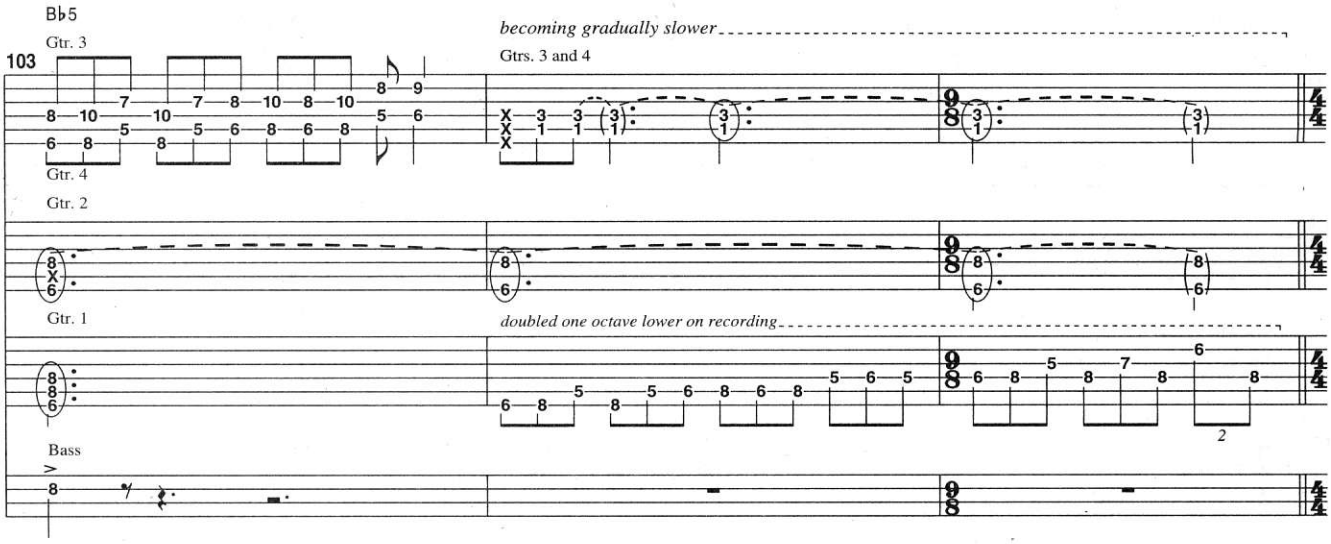
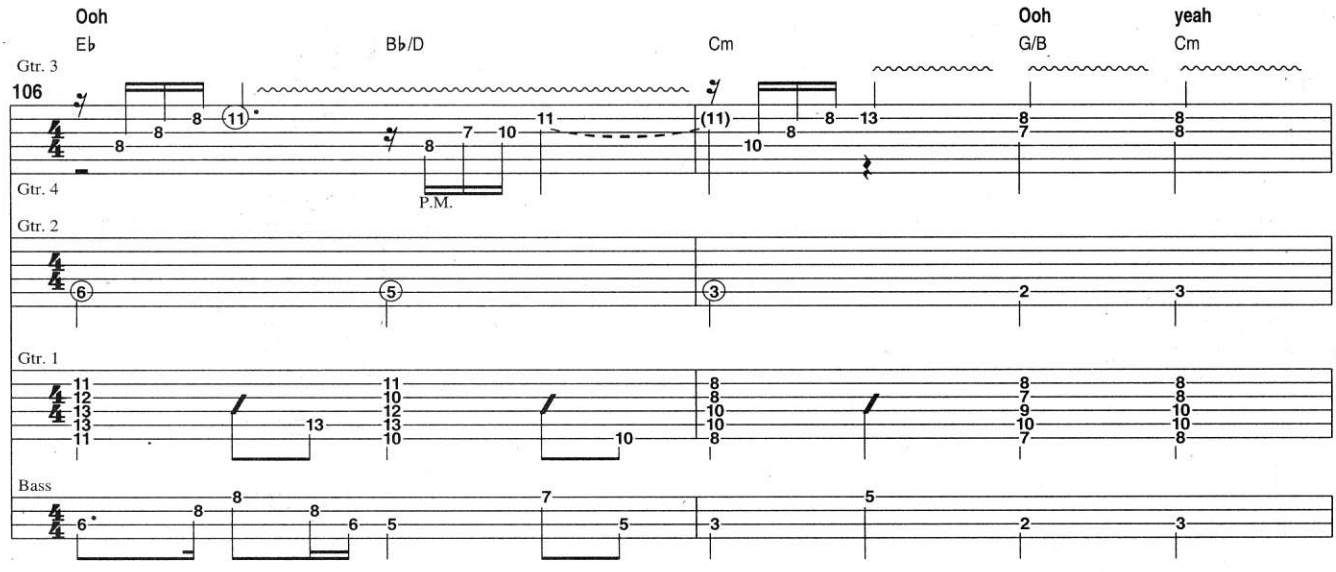
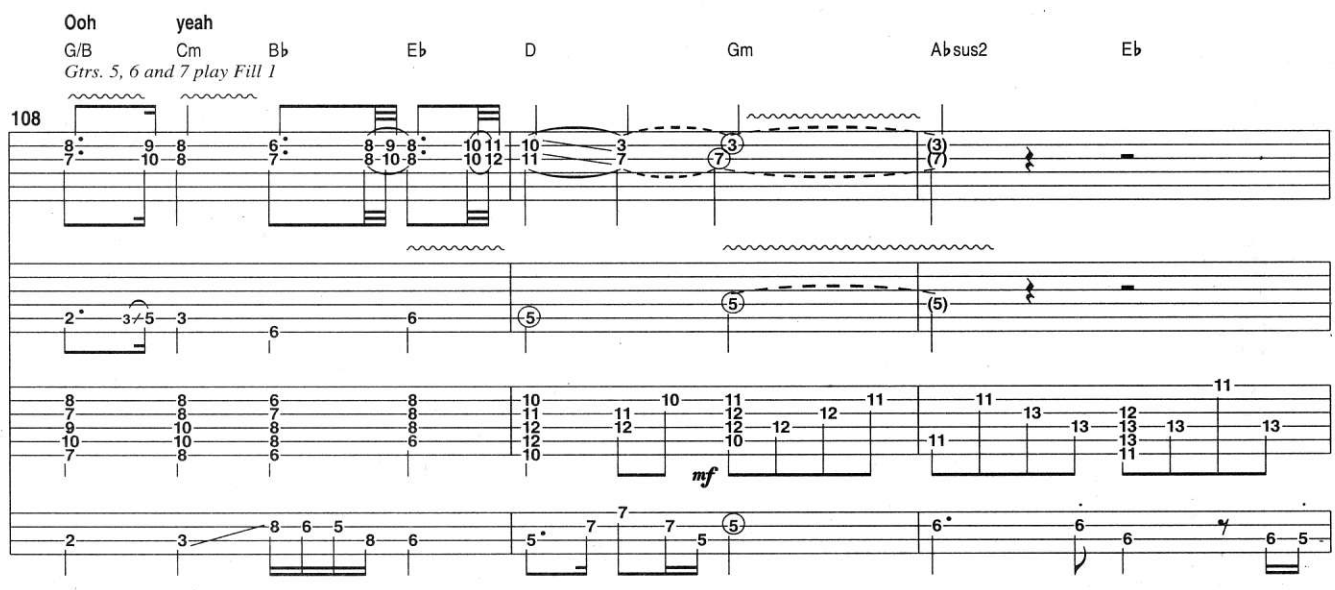


G **Outro** (4:55)

Slower ♩ = 72





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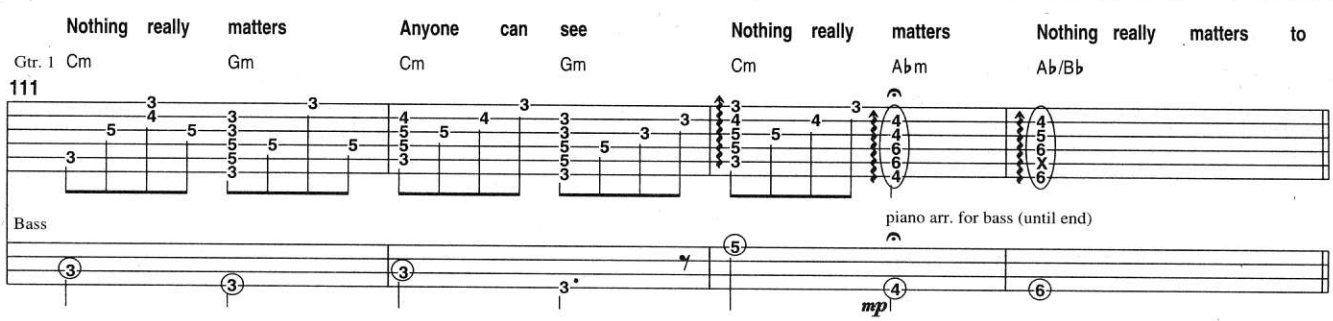
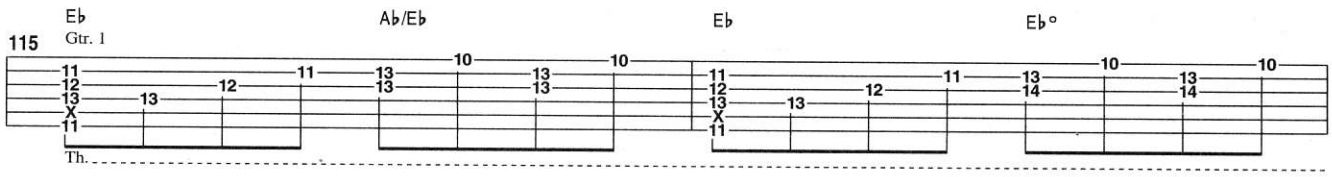
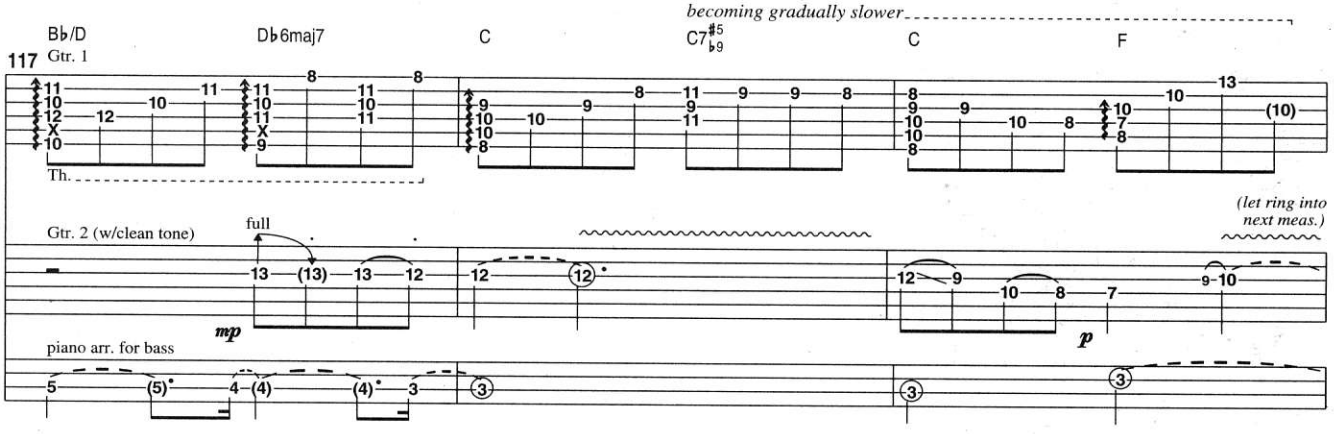
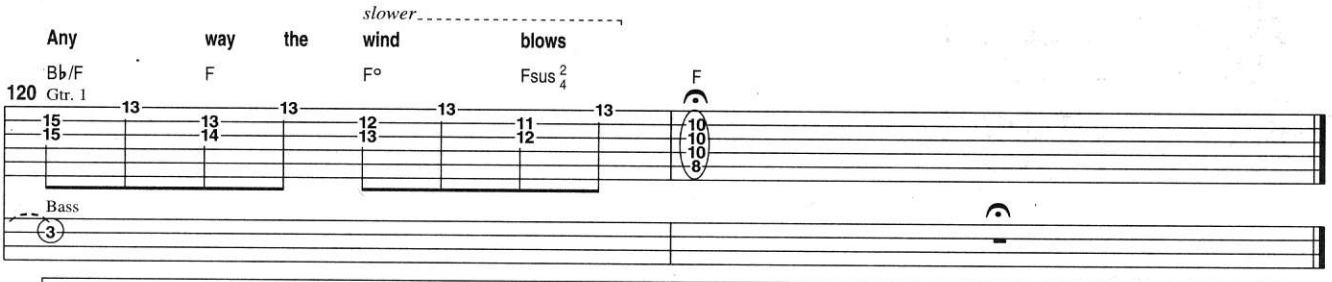
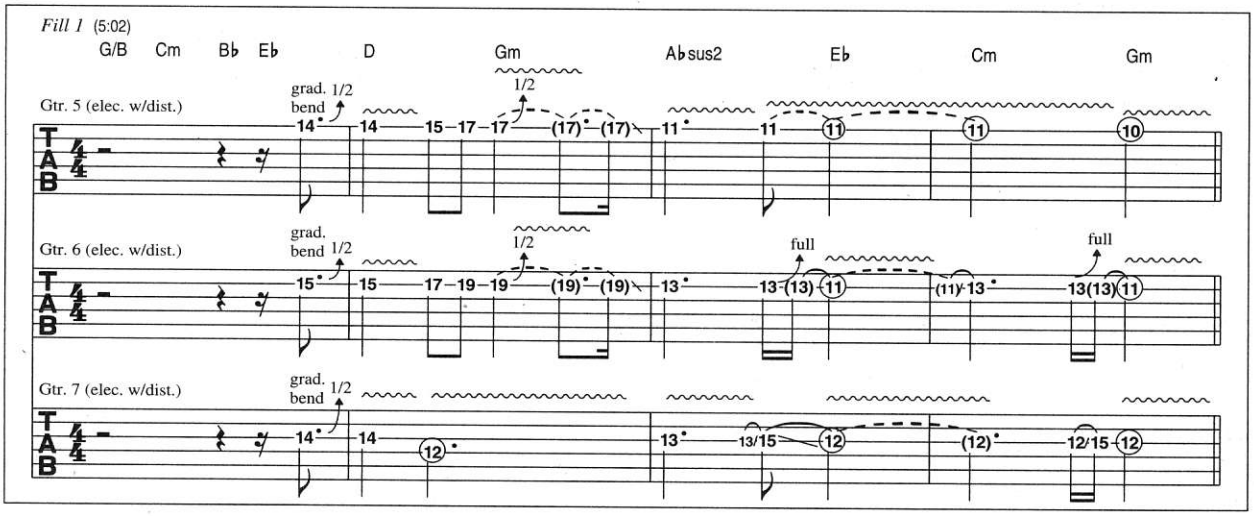


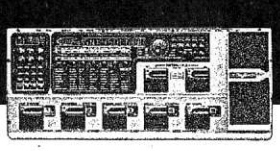
Freely (5:26)
me











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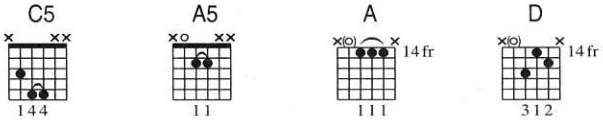
"WE WILL ROCK YOU"

As heard on ***News of the World*** (HOLLYWOOD)

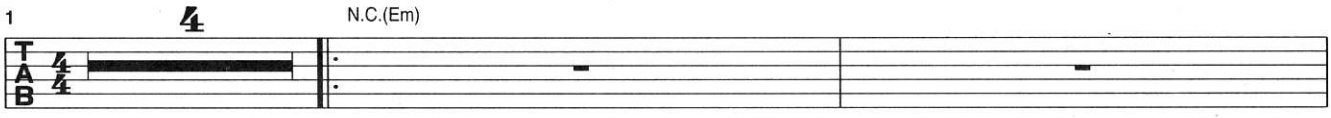
Words and Music by **Brian May** • Transcribed by **Andy Robyns**



A **Intro** (0:00)
Moderately ♩ = 84

B **Verses** (0:12, 0:36, 1:00)

1. Buddy you're a boy make a big noise playin' in the street gonna be a big man someday You got
2. Buddy you're a young man hard man shoutin' in the street gonna take on the world someday You got
3. Buddy you're an old man poor man pleadin' with your eyes gonna make you some peace someday You got

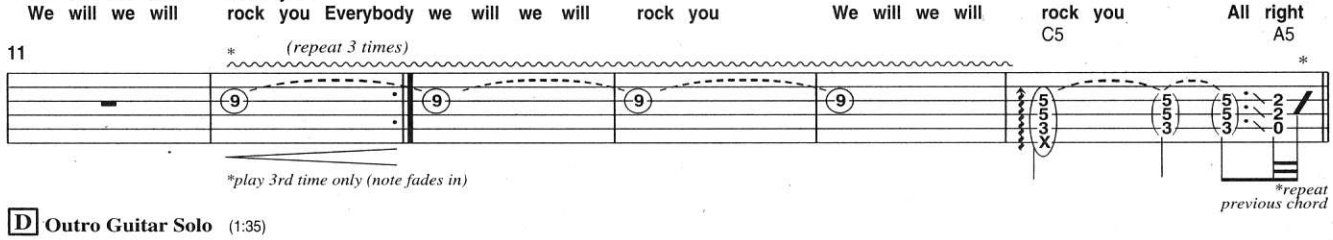


C **Chorus** (0:24, 0:48, 1:11)

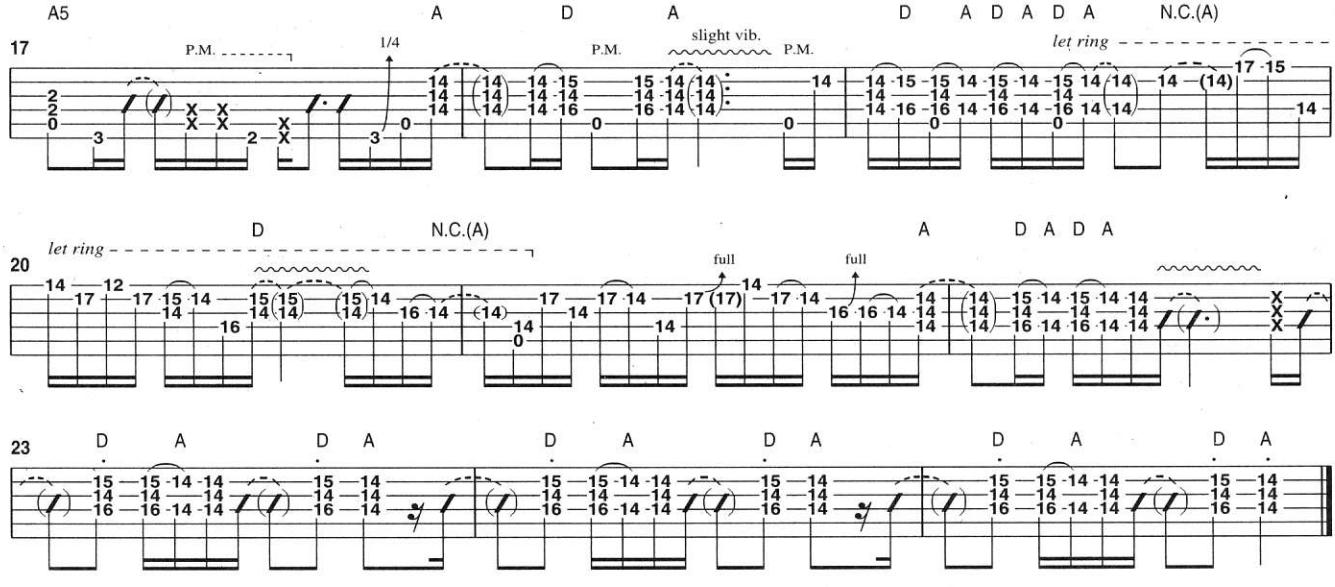
mud on your face You big disgrace Kickin' your can all over the place Singin' we will we will rock you
blood on your face You big disgrace Wavin' your banner all over the place We will we will rock you Sing it
mud on your face Big disgrace Somebody better put you back into your place We will we will rock you Sing it

(1:23)

We will we will rock you
We will we will rock you
We will we will rock you Everybody we will we will rock you We will we will rock you All right



D **Outro Guitar Solo** (1:35)



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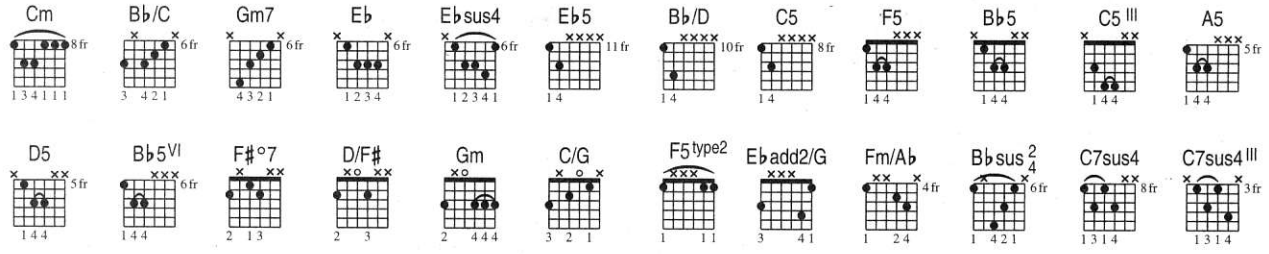
"WE ARE THE CHAMPIONS"

As heard on ***News of the World*** (HOLLYWOOD)

Words and Music by **Freddie Mercury** • Transcribed by **Jordan Baker and Matt Scharfglass**



A **1st Verse** (0:02)

Moderately Slow ♩. = 60

I've paid my dues time after time I've done my

Cm B♭/C Gm7 Cm B♭/C Gm7

*Gtr. 1 (clean elec.)

*piano arr. for gtr.

**repeat previous chord

Bass

sentence but committed no crime And bad mistakes I've made a few

Cm B♭/C Gm7 Cm B♭/C Gm7 E♭ E♭sus4

*Gtr. 2 (clean elec.)

*two gtrs. arr. for one

I've had my share of sand kicked in my face but I've come through And I need to go

E♭ E♭sus4 E♭5 B♭/D C5 F5 B♭5

Rhy. Fig. 1 (w/dist.)

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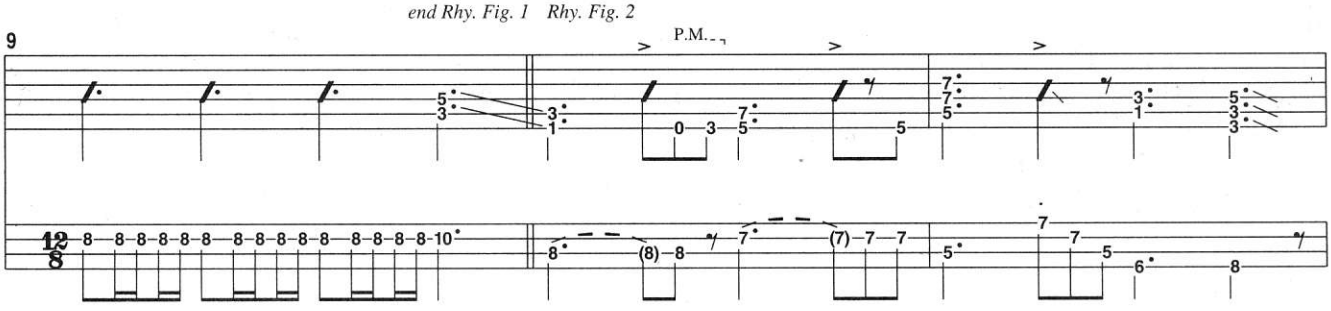
B **1st Chorus** (0:35)

on and on and on and on We are the champions my friends and

C5 III F5 A5 D5 B♭5 C5 III

end Rhy. Fig. 1 *Rhy. Fig. 2*

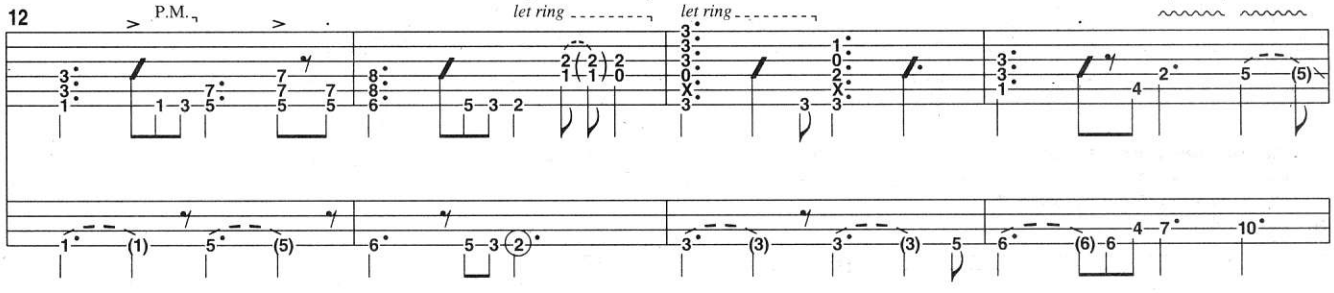
9



we'll keep on fighting 'til the end We are the champions we are the champions

F5 A5 B♭5 VI F♯°7 D/F♯ Gm C/G B♭5 N.C.(D♭°7)

12

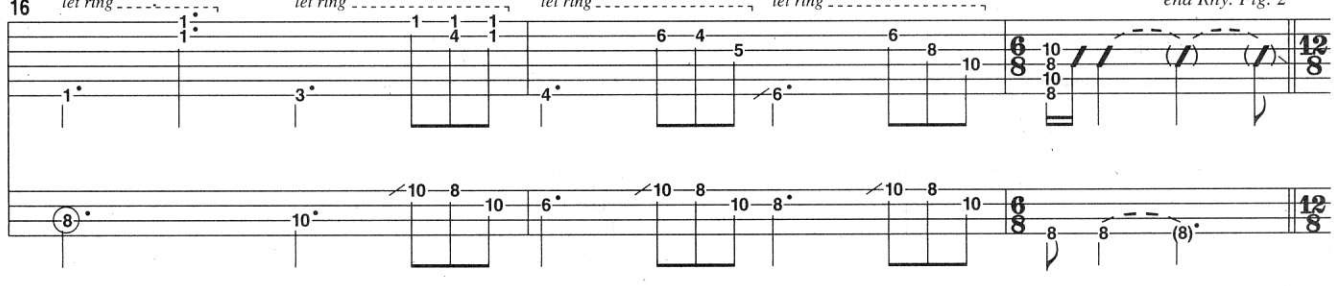


No time for losers 'cause we are the champions of the world

F5 type2 E♭add2/G Fm/A♭ B♭sus 2/4 C7sus4

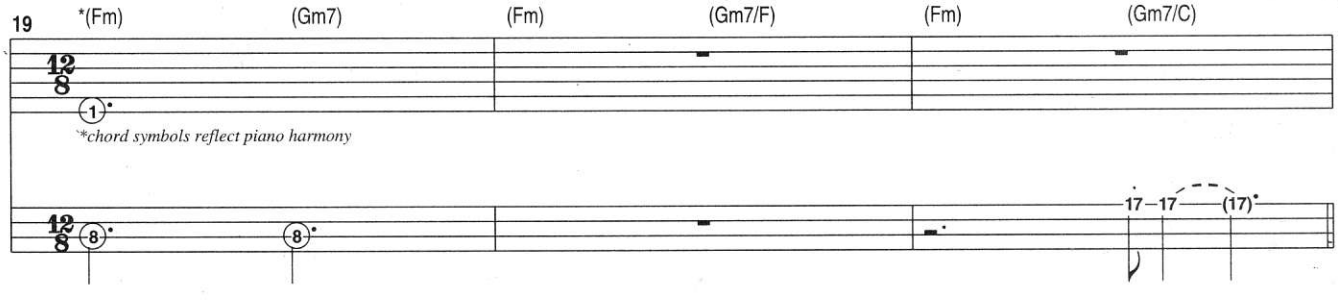
let ring *let ring* *let ring* *let ring* *end Rhy. Fig. 2*

16



I've taken my

19 *(Fm) (Gm7) (Fm) (Gm7/F) (Fm) (Gm7/C)



**chord symbols reflect piano harmony*

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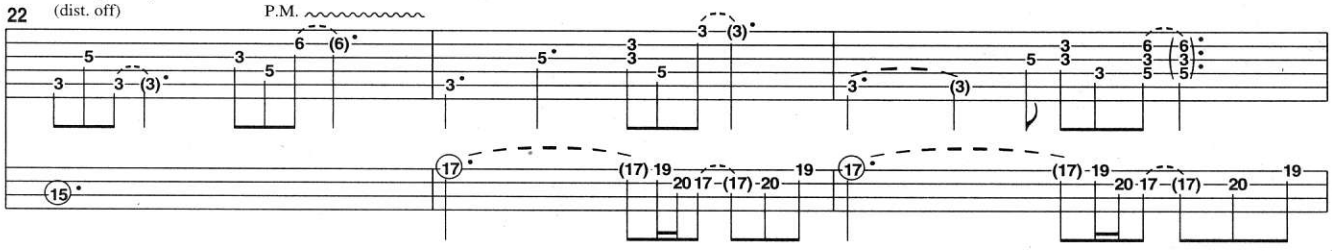
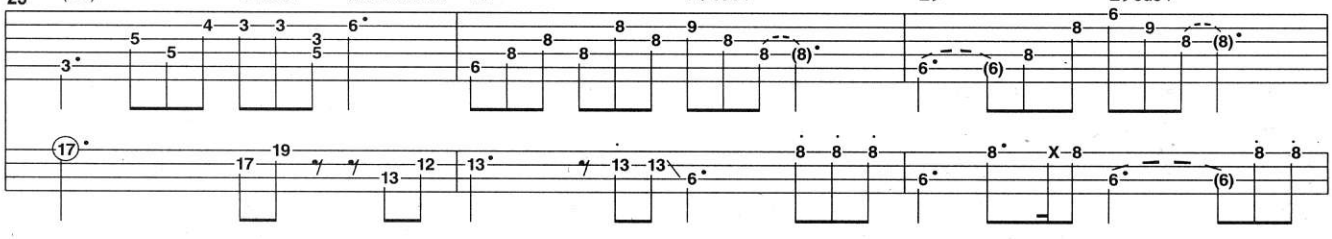
C **2nd Verse** (1:18)

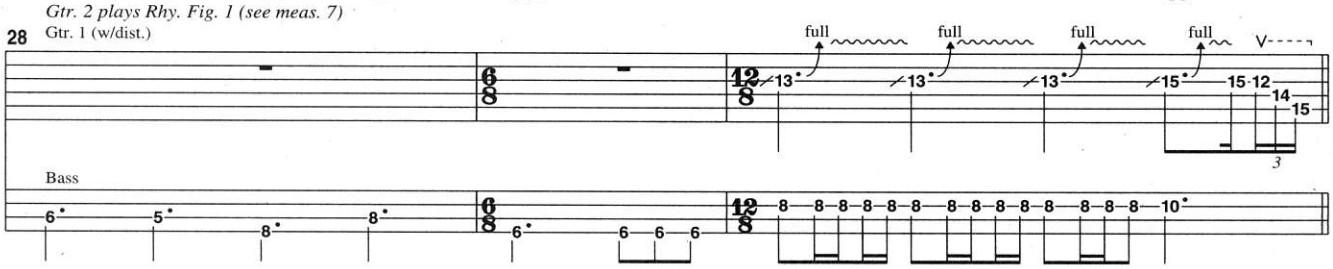
bows and my curtain calls You brought me fame and fortune and everything that goes with it I thanked
(C5) C7sus4 III (C5) C7sus4 III (C5) C7sus4 III
let ring throughout
22 (dist. off) P.M.



you all But it's been no bed of roses no pleasure cruise I consider it a
(C5) C7sus4 III E♭ E♭sus4 E♭ E♭sus4
25

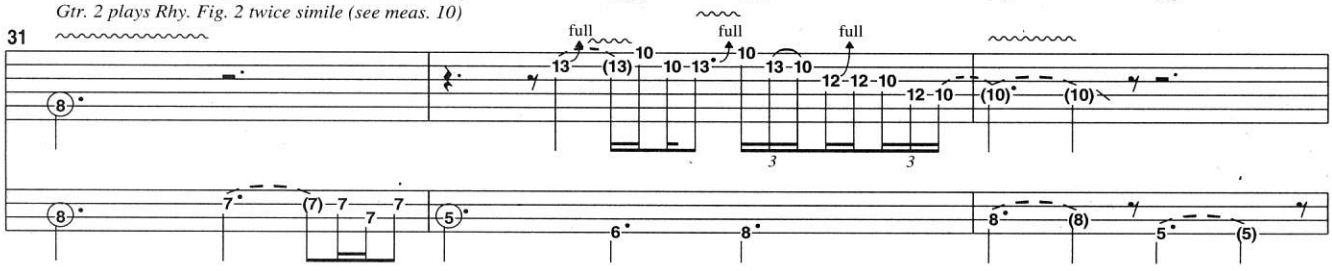


challenge before all human race and I'd never lose and the meters go on and on and on and on
E♭ B♭/D C5 F5 B♭5 C5 III
Gtr. 2 plays Rhy. Fig. 1 (see meas. 7)
28 Gtr. 1 (w/dist.)

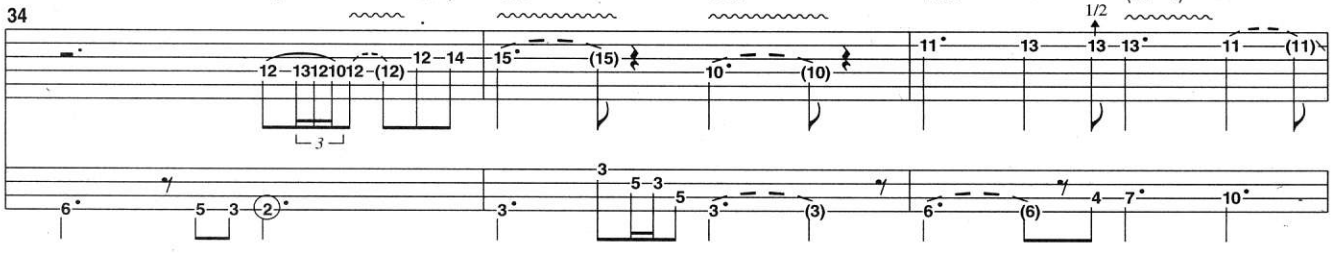


D **2nd Chorus** (1:51)

We are the champions my friends and we'll keep on fighting 'til
F5 A5 D5 B♭5 C5 III F5 A5
Gtr. 2 plays Rhy. Fig. 2 twice simile (see meas. 10)
31

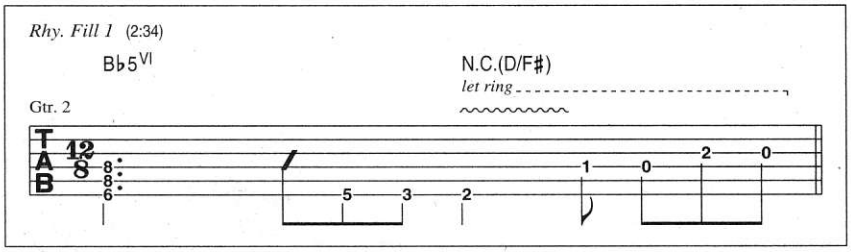


the end We are the champions we are the champions
B♭5 VI F♯°7 D/F♯ Gm C/G B♭5 (D♭°7)
34



"WE ARE THE CHAMPIONS"

Rhy. Fill 1 (2:34)



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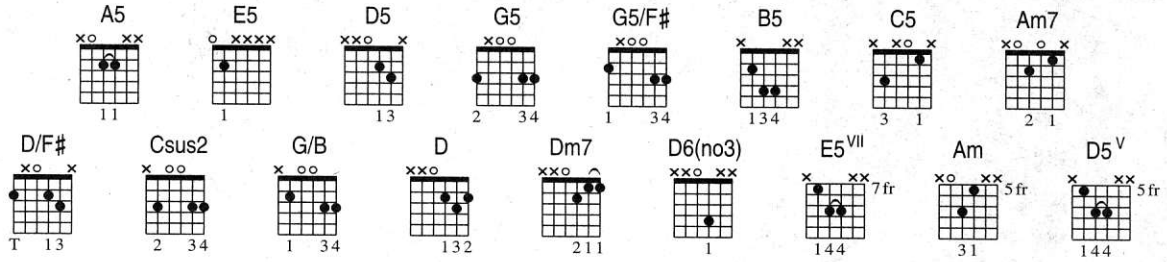
"OGRE BATTLE"

As heard on ***Queen II*** (ELEKTRA)

Words and Music by **Freddie Mercury** • Transcribed by **Jeff Perrin**



A **Intro** (0:34)

Moderately ♩ = 110

A5 N.C. N.C.(A5)

(sound effects and backwards vocal)

*Gtr. 1 (elec. w/dist.)

P.M.

(two gtrs. arr. for one)

** repeat previous chord

† repeat previous beat

*Bass

*"backward" gtr. and bass tracks arr. for live performance

(G5) A5 E5

P.M.

(repeat previous measure)

B (0:47, 2:06)

A5 E5 N.C.(G5) (A5)

("forward" music begins here on recording)

P.M.

Bass Fig. 1

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(2nd time) skip ahead to **E**

(1.) Ah ah ah ah ah Now once upon
(2.) Ah ah ah ah ah Huh

(C5) (D5) (F5) (G5) A5 D5

11

C **1st and 2nd Verses** (1:03, 1:33)

(2.) great a big time an old man told me a fable when the piper is gone and the
cry and he can swallow up the ocean with a mighty tongue he catches flies and the

G5 G5/F♯ B5 E5 G5 E5

Grtrs. 2 and 3 play Fill 2 second time (see below)

let ring

14

P.M. P.M. P.M. P.M.

soup is cold on the table And if the black crow flies to find a new destination
palm of a hand incredible size One great big eye has to focus in your direction

C5 Am7 D5 D/F♯ G5 G5/F♯ B5 E5

Grtrs. 2 and 3 play Fill 1 first time (see below)
Gtr. 1 substitutes Rhy. Fill 1 second time (see below)
Grtrs. 2 and 3 play Fill 3 second time (see below)

17

P.M. P.M. P.M.

Fill 1 (1:09)

Gtr. 2 (elec. w/dist.)

full

Gtr. 3 (elec. (w/dist.)

P.M.

Fill 2 (1:35)

Gtrs. 2 and 3

dive w/bar

Fill 3 (1:43)

Gtr. 2

Gtr. 3

full full

Rhy. Fill 1 (1:39)

C5 Am7 D5

Gtr. 1

P.M.

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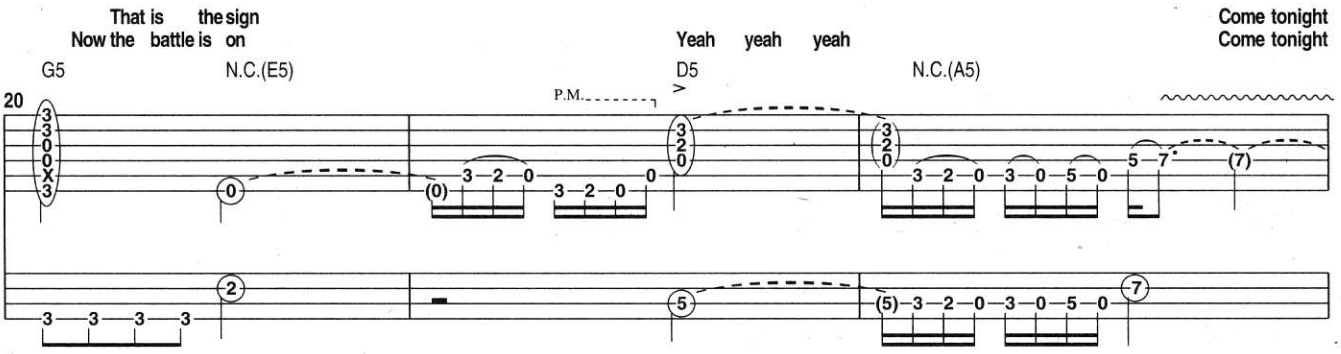
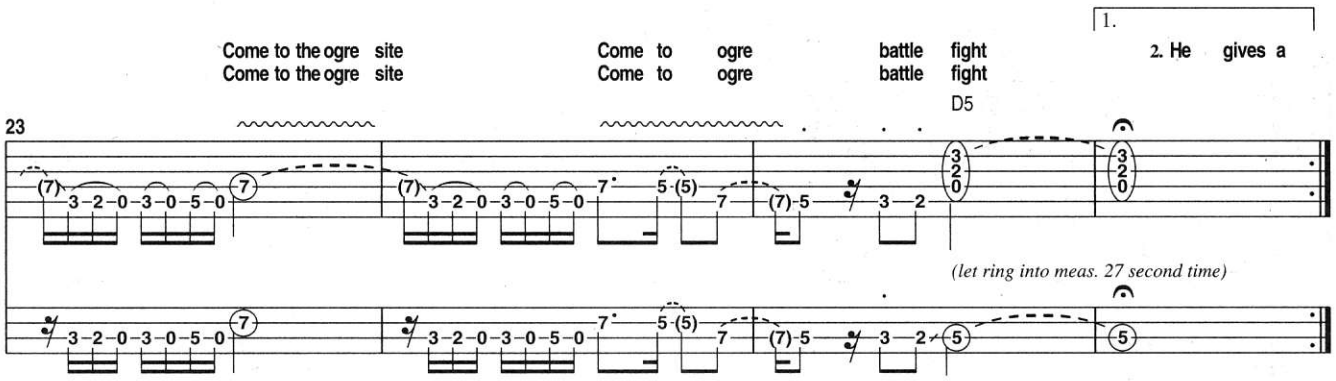
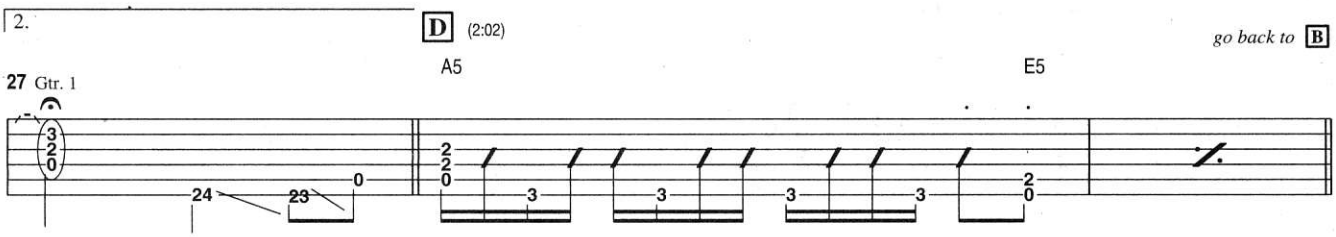
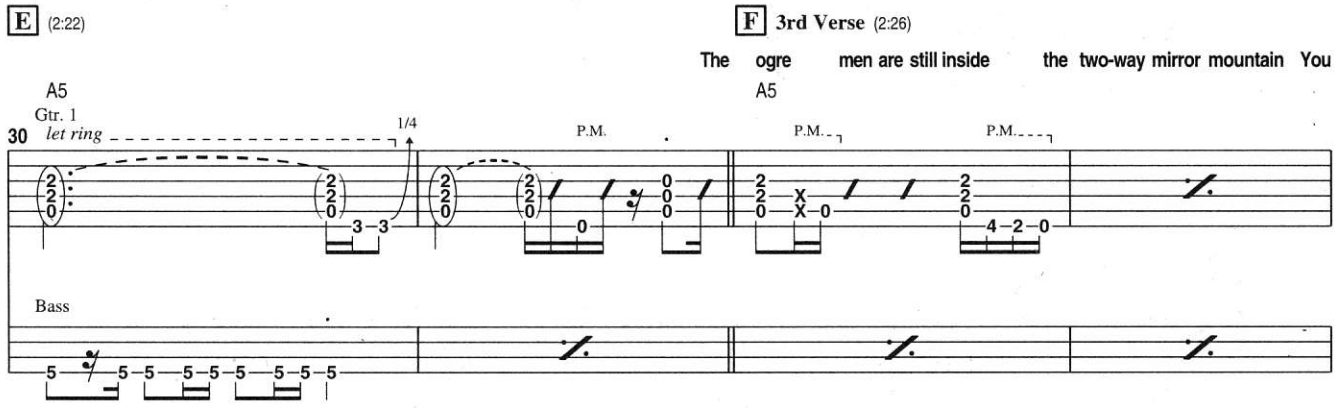




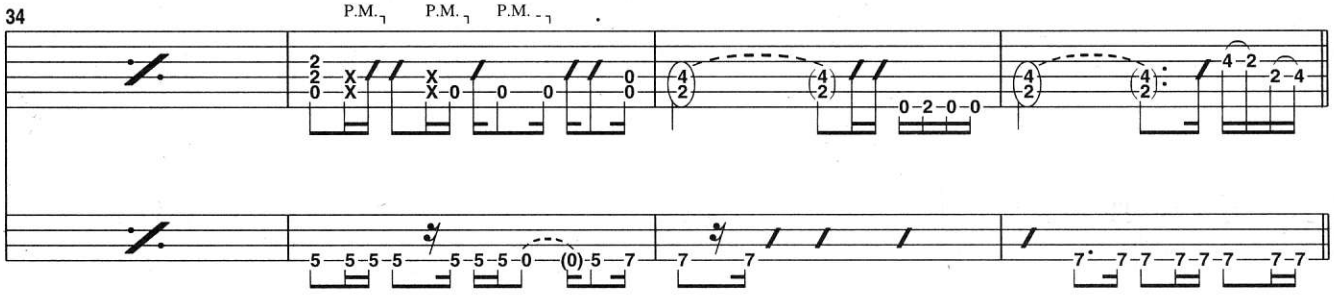




gotta keep down right out of sight You can't see in but they can see out Ooh keep a look out The

B5

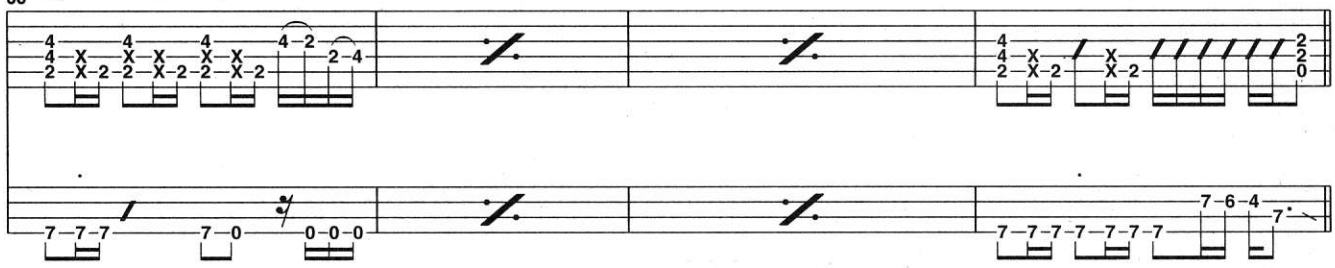
34



G (2:40)

ogre men are coming out from the two-way mirror mountain They're running up behind and they're coming all about Can't go east 'cause you gotta go south

38 B5

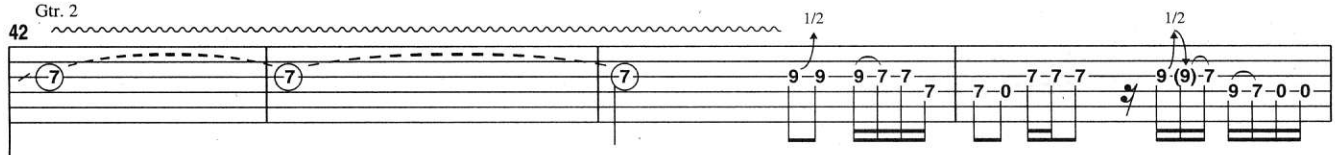


H **Interlude** (2:49)

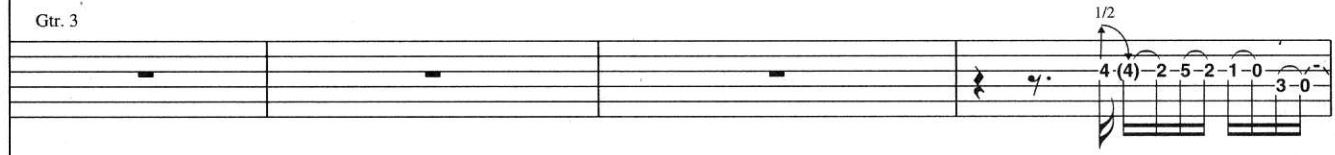
D5 Csus2 G/B Csus2 D Csus2 G/B

Gtr. 2

42



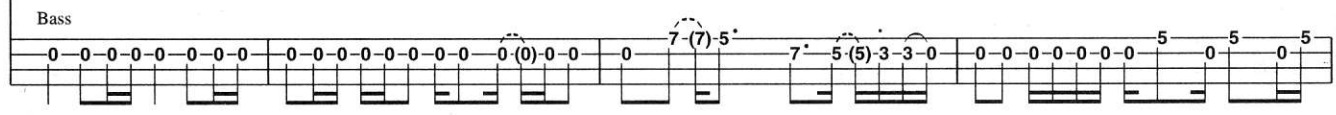
Gtr. 3



Gtr. 1

let ring throughout

Bass



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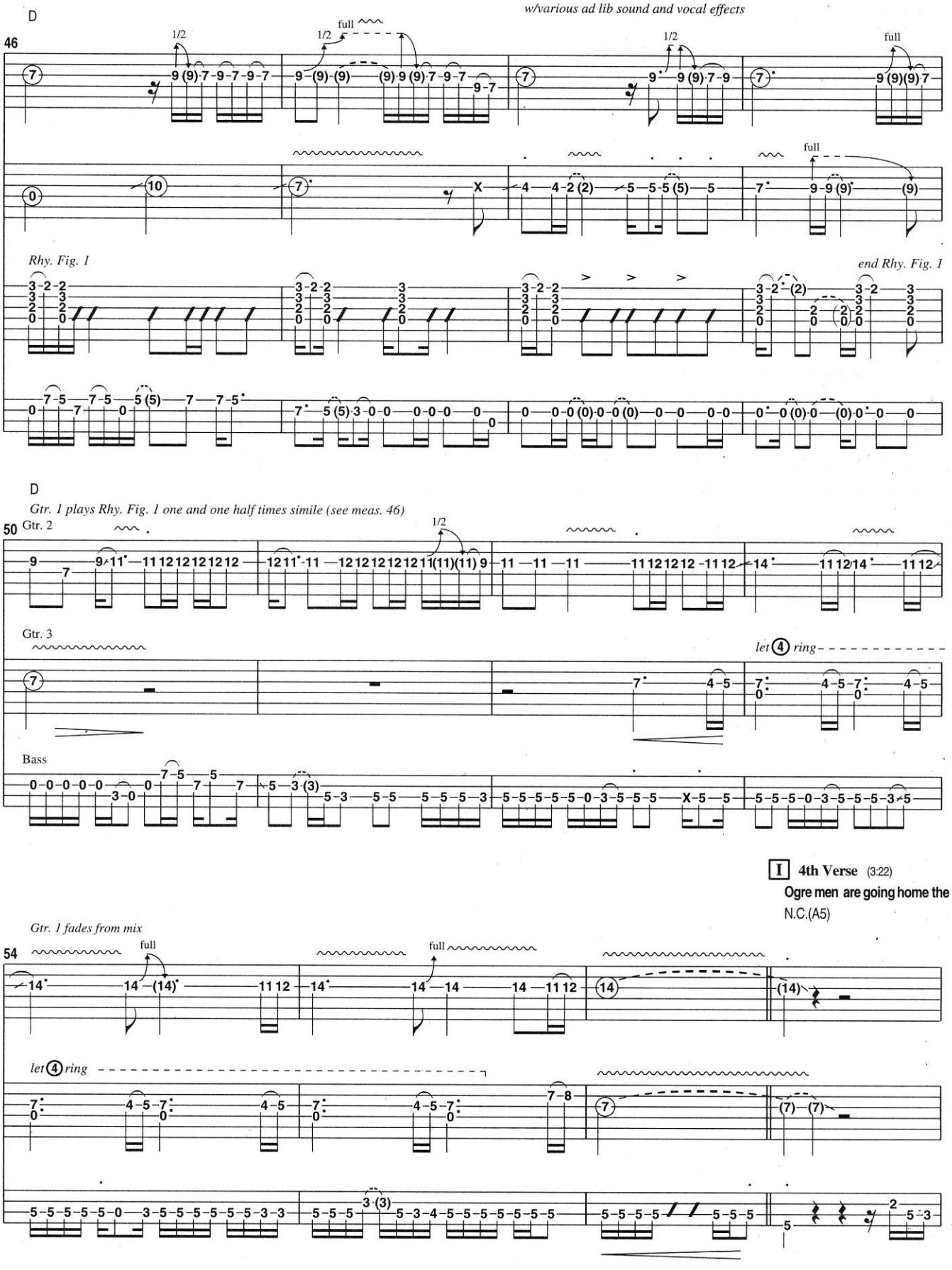
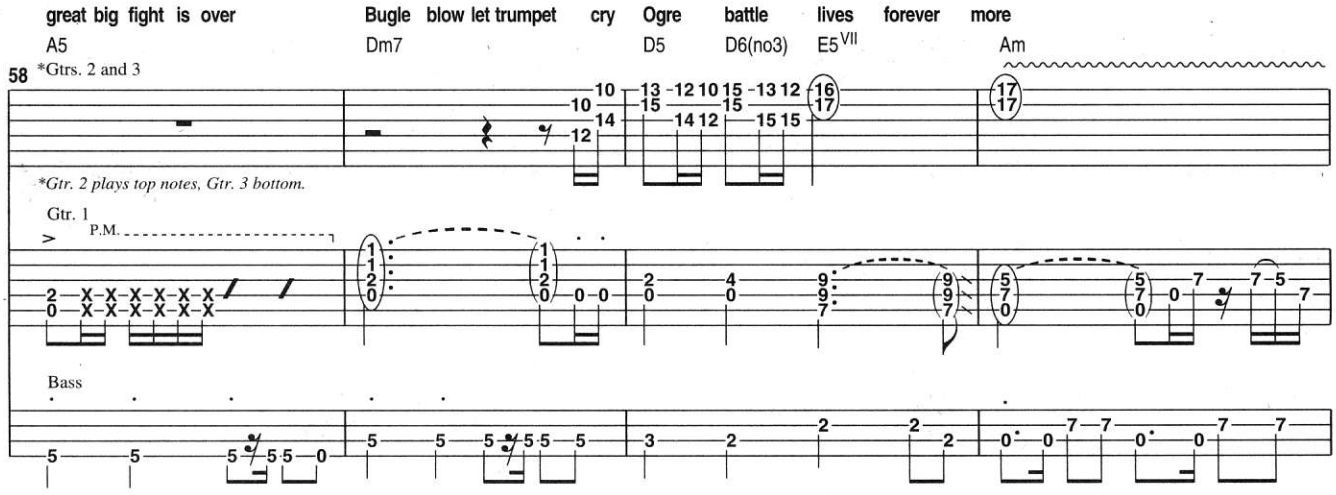
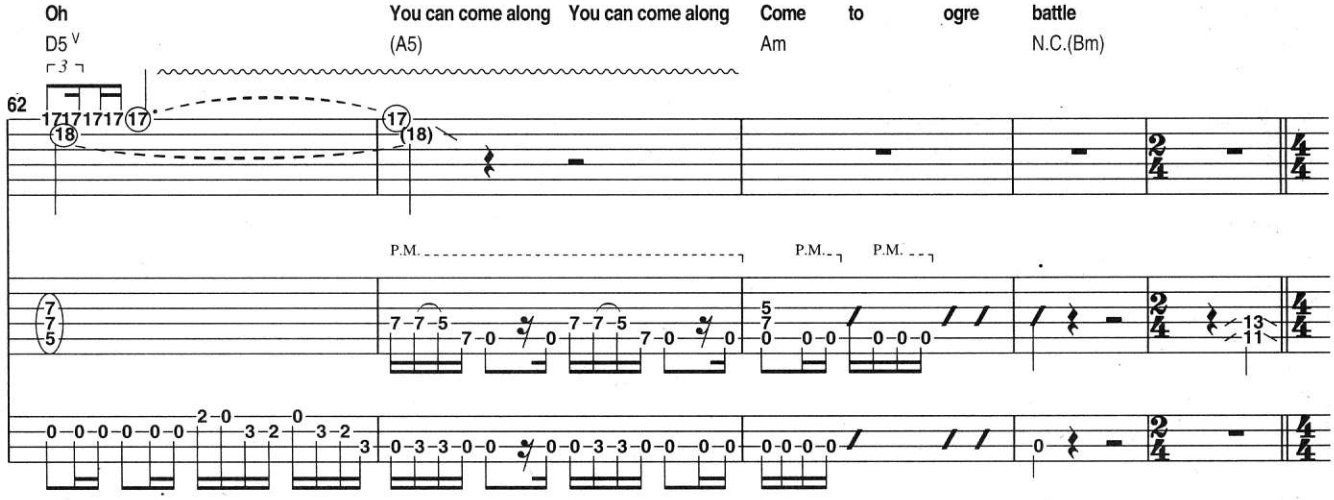
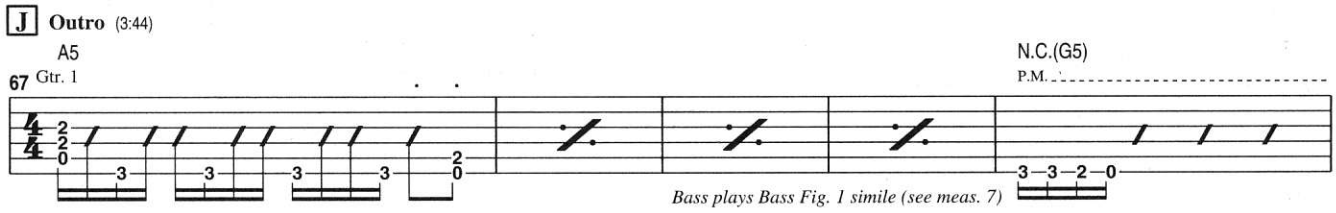
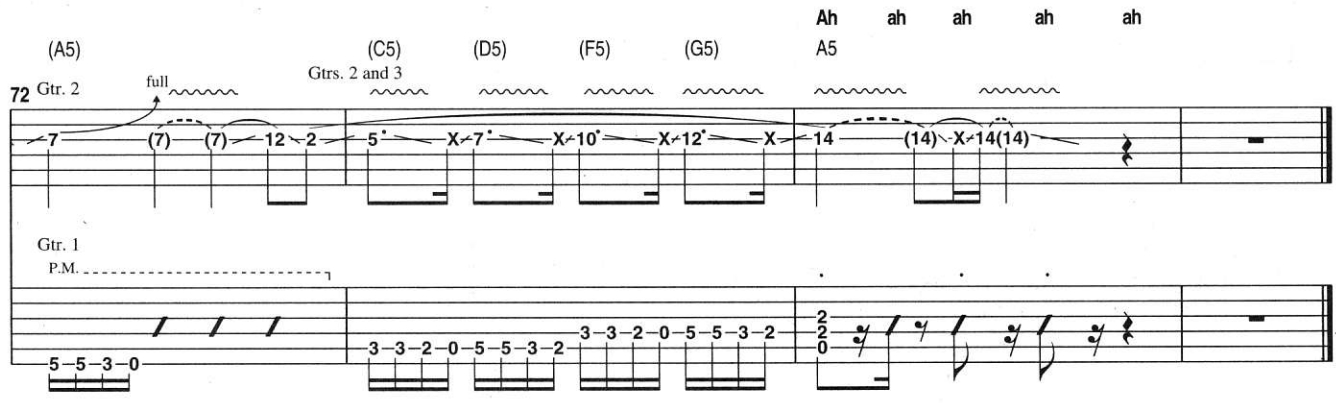



great big fight is over
Bugle blow let trumpet cry
Ogre battle lives forever more
A5
Dm7
D5
D6(no3)
E5VII
Am
58
*Gtrs. 2 and 3
*Gtr. 2 plays top notes, Gtr. 3 bottom.
Gtr. 1
P.M.
Bass


Oh
You can come along
You can come along
Come to ogre battle
D5V
(A5)
Am
N.C.(Bm)
62
P.M.
P.M.
P.M.


J Outro (3:44)
A5
67 Gtr. 1
N.C.(G5)
P.M.
Bass plays Bass Fig. 1 simile (see meas. 7)


Ah ah ah ah ah
(A5)
(C5)
(D5)
(F5)
(G5)
A5
72 Gtr. 2
full
Gtrs. 2 and 3
Gtr. 1
P.M.

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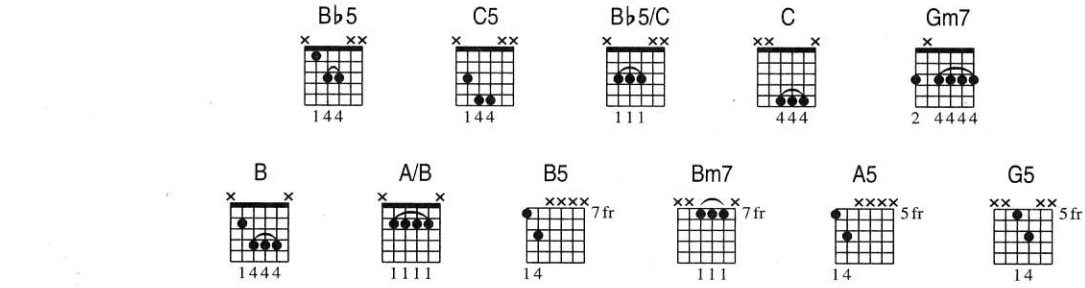
"STONE COLD CRAZY"

As heard on ***Sheer Heart Attack*** (ELEKTRA)

Words and Music by **Freddie Mercury, Brian May, Roger Taylor and John Deacon** • Transcribed by **Jeff Perrin**



A **Intro** (0:00)

Fast ♩ **= 248**

N.C.

Gtr. 1 (elec. w/dist.) w/bar

N.H.

pitch: B

(G5) B♭5 (G5)

Gtr. 3 plays Fill 1 third time (see below)

*Gtrs. 1 and 2 (elec. w/dist.)

Rhy. Fig. 1 *(play 3 times)*

end Rhy. Fig. 1

**P.M. P.M. P.M.

*composite arrangement

**palm mutes performed w/very light touch throughout

Bass

Bass Fig. 1 *(play 3 times)*

end Bass Fig. 1

(G5) B♭5 (G5)

Gtr. 1 plays Rhy. Fig. 1 (see meas. 6)

Gtr. 2

Bass plays Bass Fig. 1 (see meas. 6)

Fill 1 (0:14)

Gtr. 3 (elec. w/dist.) P.M.

Bass Fill 1 (0:22, 1:06, 1:51)

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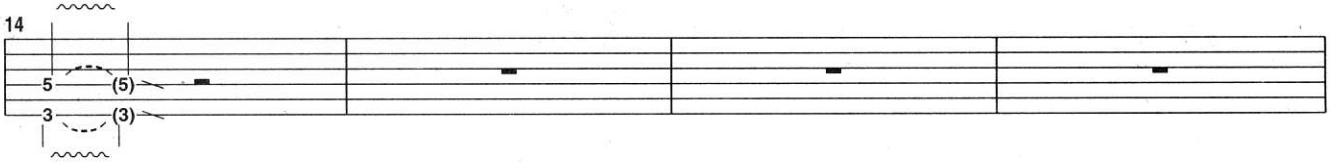
B **1st and 3rd Verses** (0:22, 1:51)

1. Sleeping very soundly on a Saturday morning I was dreaming I was Al Capone There's a
3. Walking down the street shooting people that I meet with my rubber Tommy water gun

N.C.(G5)

Gtr. 2

14

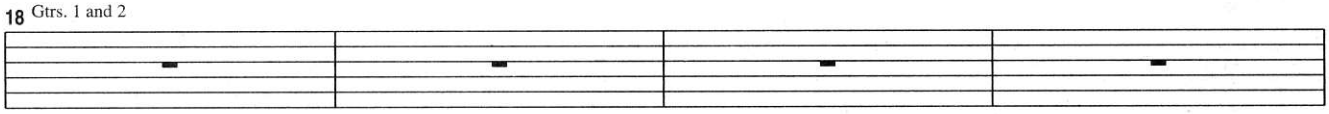


Gtr. 1

Bass plays Bass Fill 1 (see previous page)

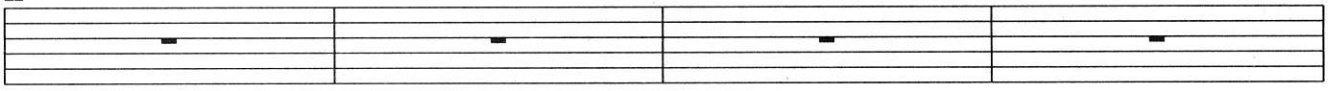
rumor going 'round gotta clear outta town Yeah I'm smelling like a dry fish bone
Here come the deputy he's gonna come and getta me I gotta get me get up and run They got the

18 Gtrs. 1 and 2



Here come the law gonna break down the door gonna carry me away once more
sirens loose I ran right outta juice They're gonna

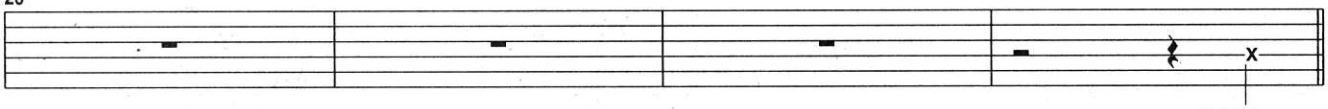
22



(2nd time) skip ahead to **J**

Never I never I never want it anymore Gotta get away from this stone cold floor
put me in the cell If I can't go to heaven will they

26 Gtr. 1 fdbk.



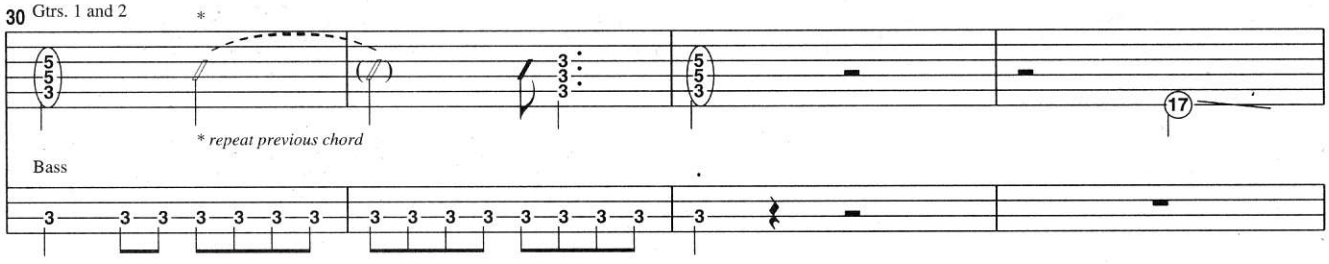
pitch: B

C **1st Chorus** (0:38)

Crazy Stone cold crazy you know

C5 B♭5/C C5

30 Gtrs. 1 and 2



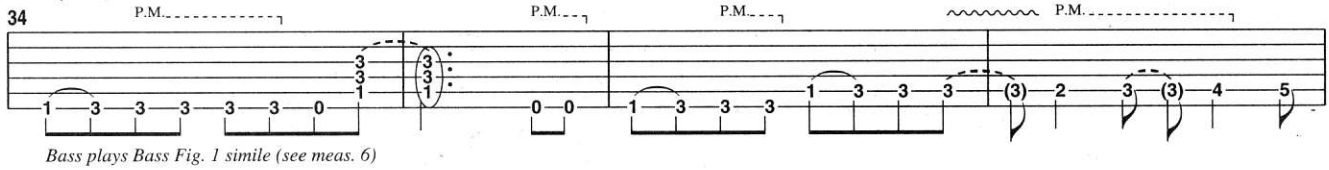
* *repeat previous chord*

Bass

(G5) B♭5 (G5)

Gtrs. 1 and 2

34 P.M. P.M. P.M. P.M.



Bass plays Bass Fig. 1 simile (see meas. 6)

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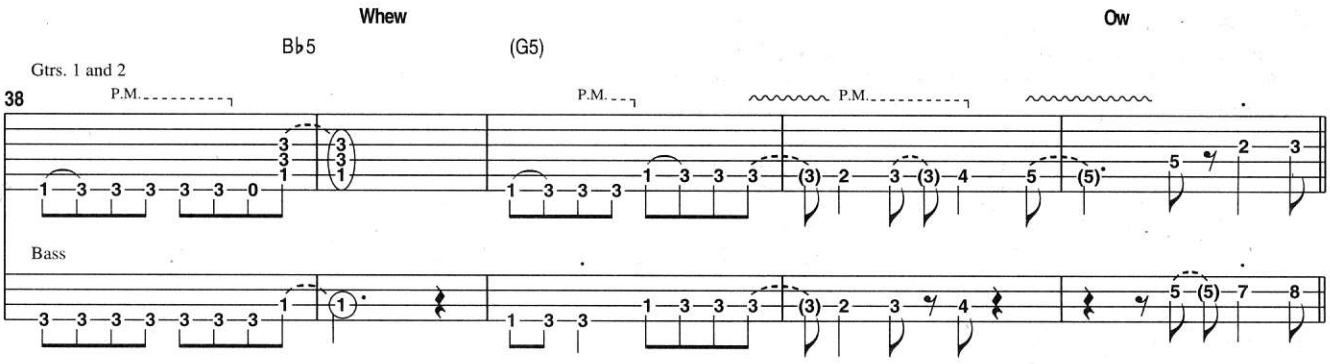
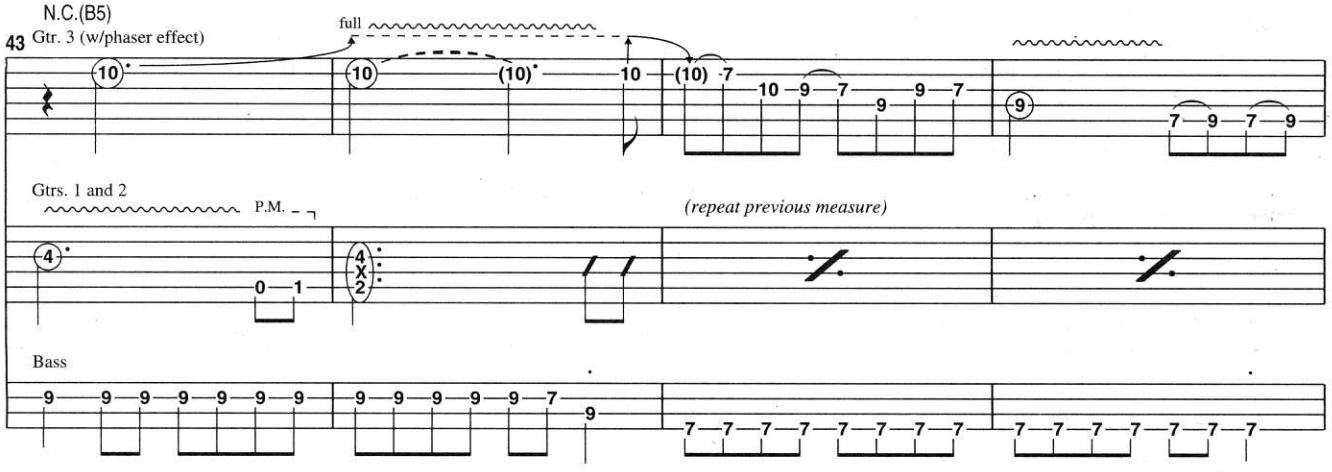
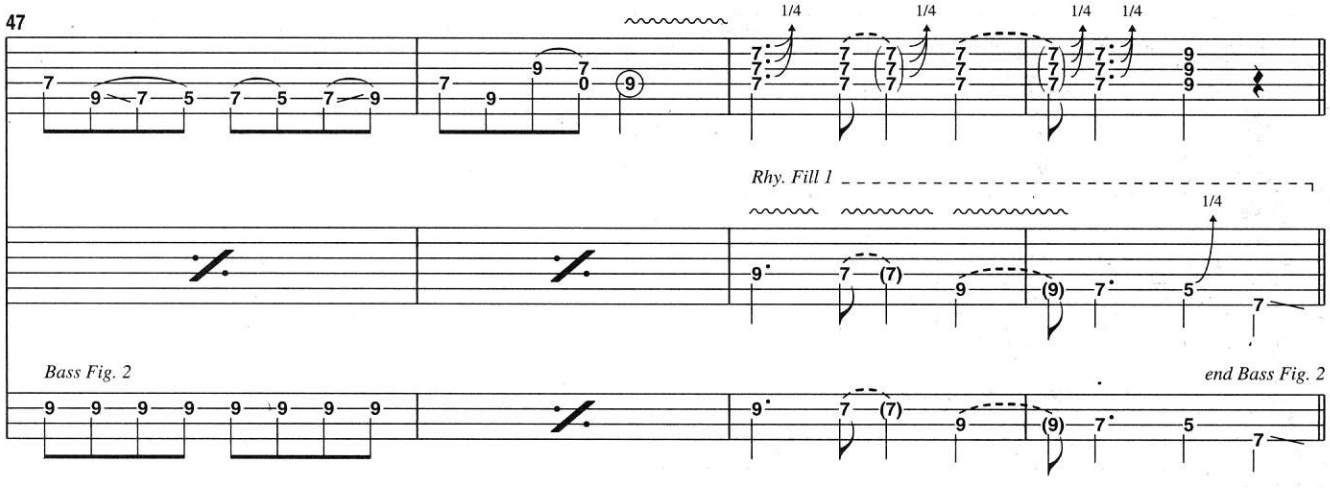
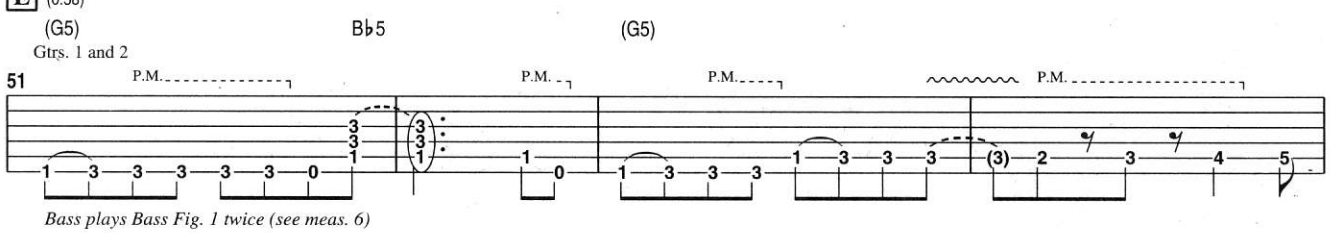


D **1st Guitar Solo** (0:51)

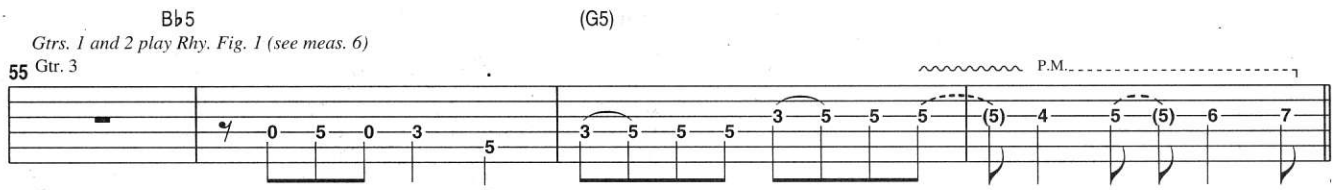




E (0:58)

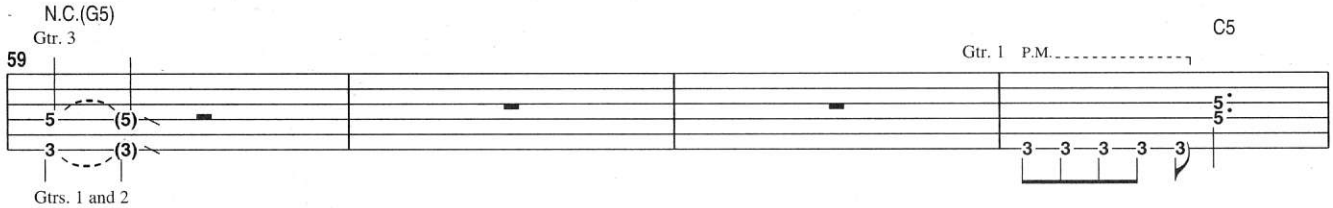


Bass plays Bass Fig. 1 twice (see meas. 6)

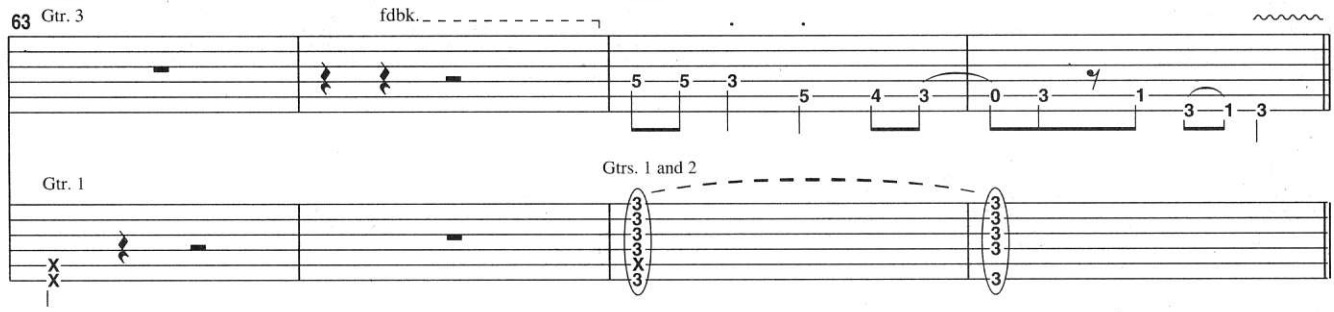


F **2nd Verse** (1:06)

Rainy afternoon I gotta blow a typhoon and I'm playing on my slide trombone

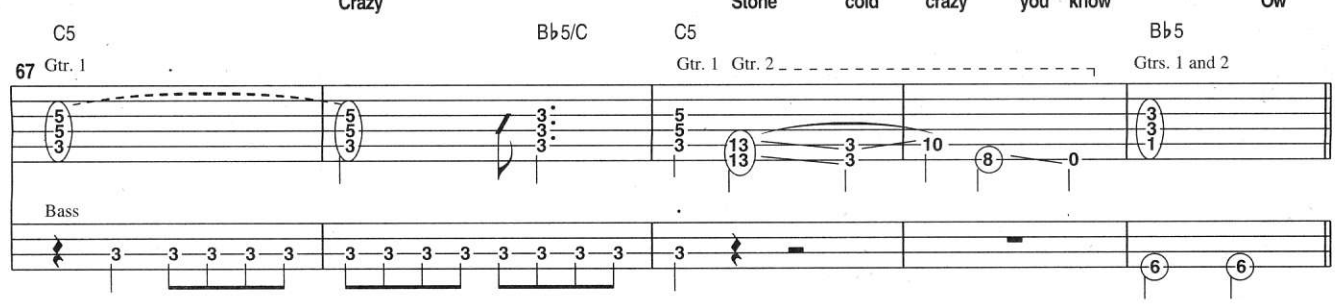


Anymore anymore cannot take it anymore Gotta get away from this stone cold floor



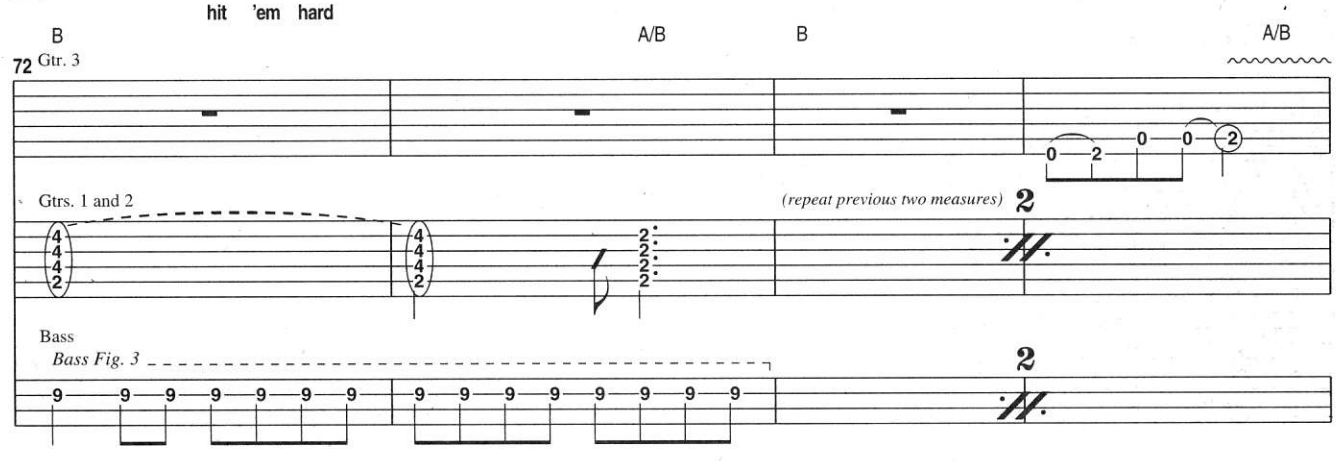
G **2nd Chorus** (1:14)

Crazy Stone cold crazy you know Ow



H **2nd Guitar Solo** (1:19)

hit 'em hard



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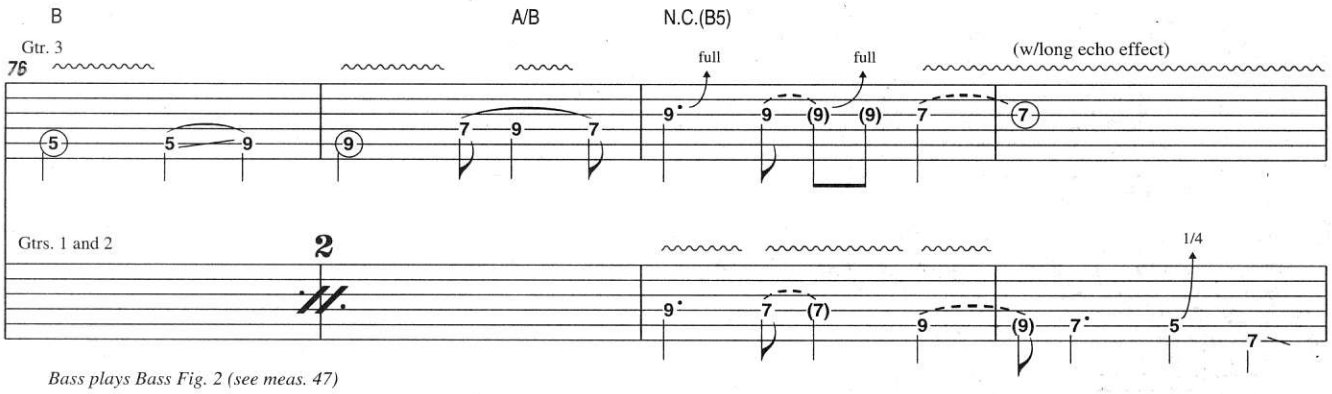
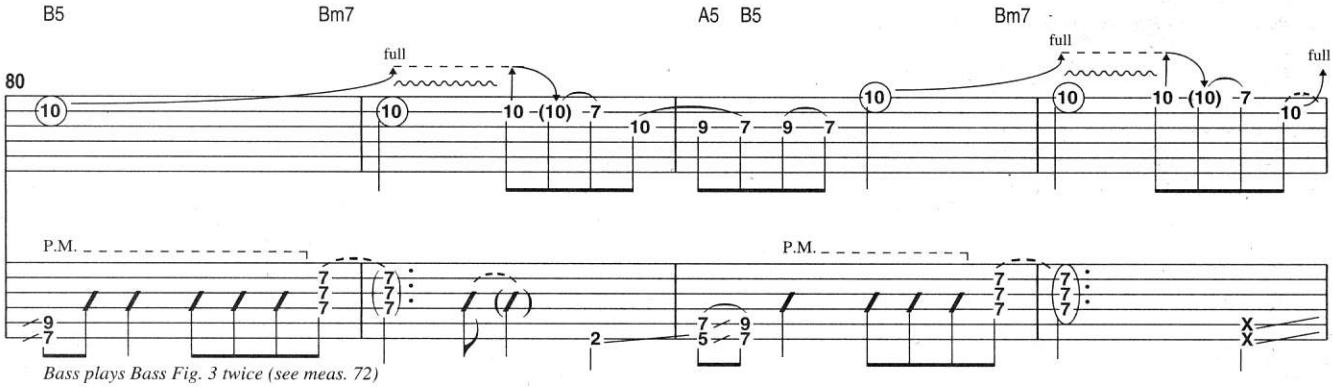
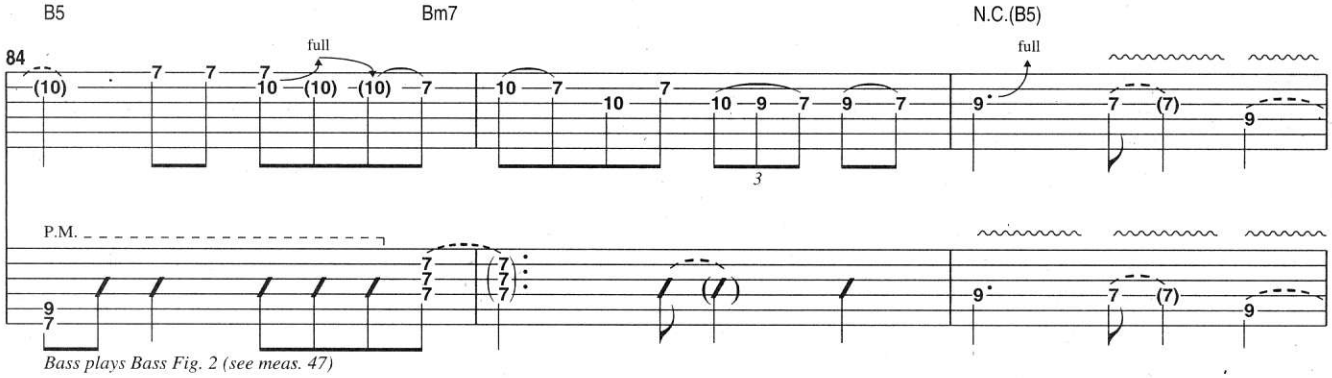


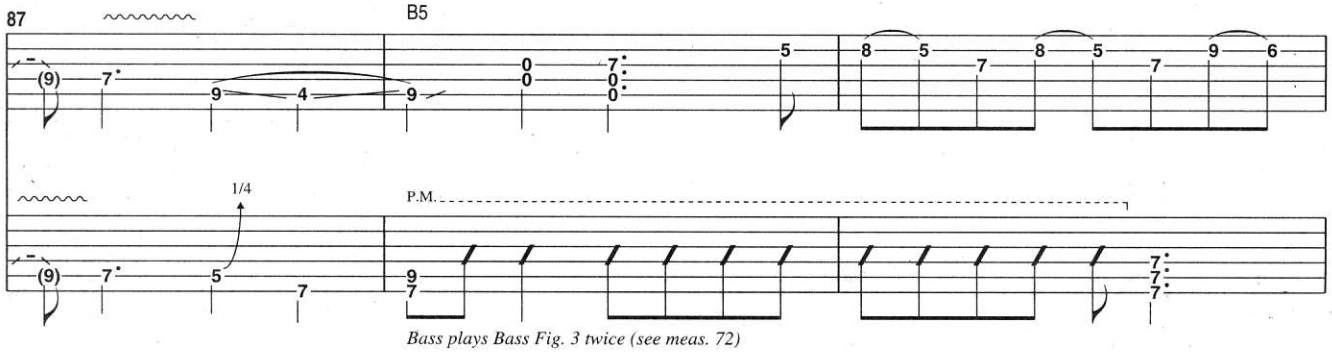
Bass plays Bass Fig. 2 (see meas. 47)



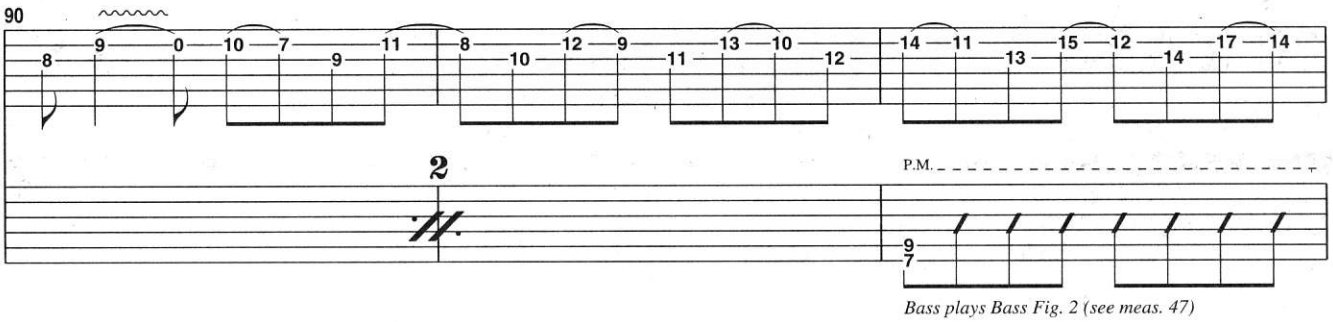
Bass plays Bass Fig. 3 twice (see meas. 72)



Bass plays Bass Fig. 2 (see meas. 47)

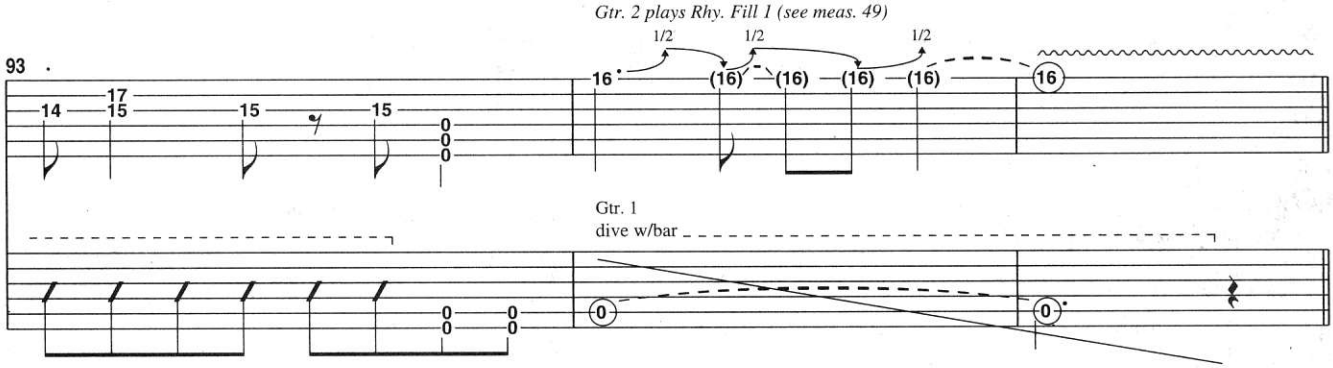


Bass plays Bass Fig. 3 twice (see meas. 72)



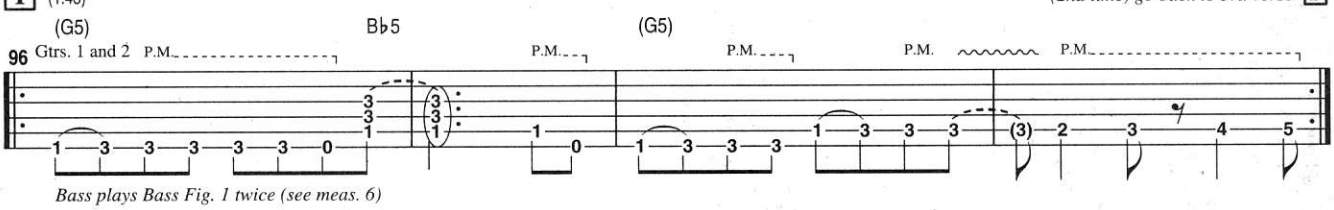
Bass plays Bass Fig. 2 (see meas. 47)

Gtr. 2 plays Rhy. Fill 1 (see meas. 49)



I (1:43)

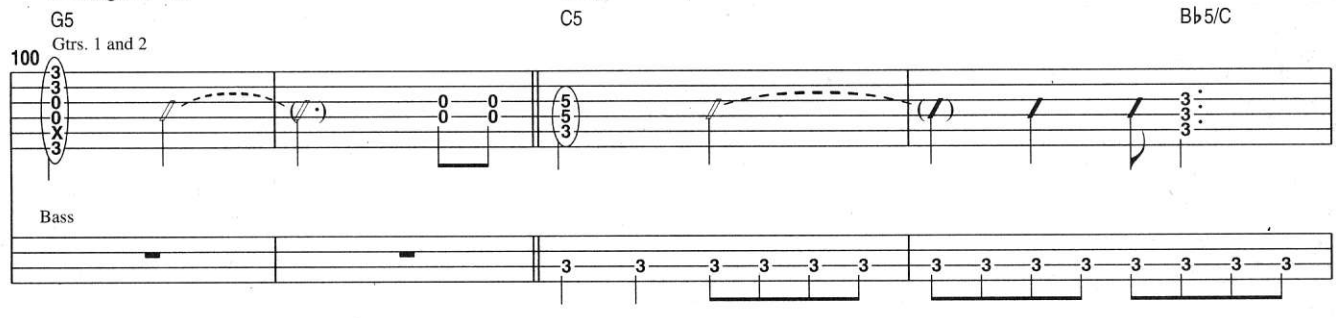
(2nd time) go back to 3rd verse **B**



Bass plays Bass Fig. 1 twice (see meas. 6)

J (2:04)

let me go to hell

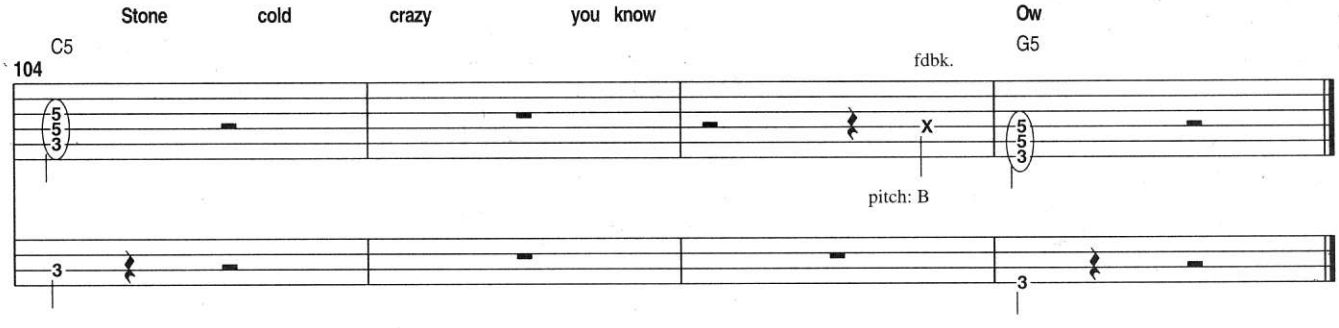


K **Outro** (2:07)

Crazy

Stone cold crazy you know

Ow



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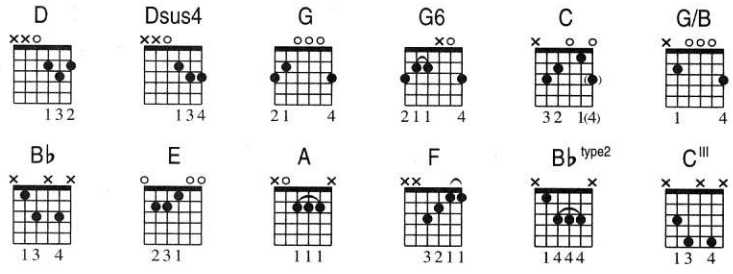
"CRAZY LITTLE THING CALLED LOVE"

As heard on ***The Game*** (HOLLYWOOD)

Words and Music by **Freddie Mercury** • Transcribed by **Jeff McErlaine and Matt Scharfglass**



A **Intro** (0:00)

Moderate Shuffle ♩ = 152 (♪♪ = ♩ ♪)

B **1st, 2nd and 5th Verses** (0:07, 0:25, 1:58)

1. This thing called love
(2.) (this thing) called love
(5.) called love

D Dsus4 D Dsus4 D D Dsus4 D

Gtr. 2 (play on 5th verse only)

1 (play 3 times)

* Gtr. 1 (acous.) ** (play 3 times) Rhy. Fig. 1

* doubled ** repeat previous chord

Bass (play 3 times) Bass Fig. 1

(called love) it I just cries I just (like a baby) can't in a can't handle cradle handle all night it it This thing It swings this thing

G G6 G C G/B G

4 (repeat previous measure) end Bass Fig. 1

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"CRAZY LITTLE THING CALLED LOVE"

(woo woo) called love it jives called love (woo woo) I must It must shakes all over get like a get 'round to it jellyfish 'round to it I ain't I kinda I ain't

D Dsus4 D Dsus4 D G G6 G C G/B G

7 Gtr. 2 1/4 full

Gtr. 1

(repeat previous four measures)

4

Bass repeats Bass Fig. 1 (see meas. 3)

(3rd time) skip ahead to outro G

1. 2. Ah this thing

ready like it ready Crazy little thing called love Crazy little thing called love

D B♭ C D

11 Gtr. 2

Gtr. 1 *end Rhy. Fig. 1*

Bass

2.

C **Bridge** (0:44)

There goes my baby She

D G

15

knows how to rock and roll She drives me crazy She gives me

C G B♭

19 *cont. simile*

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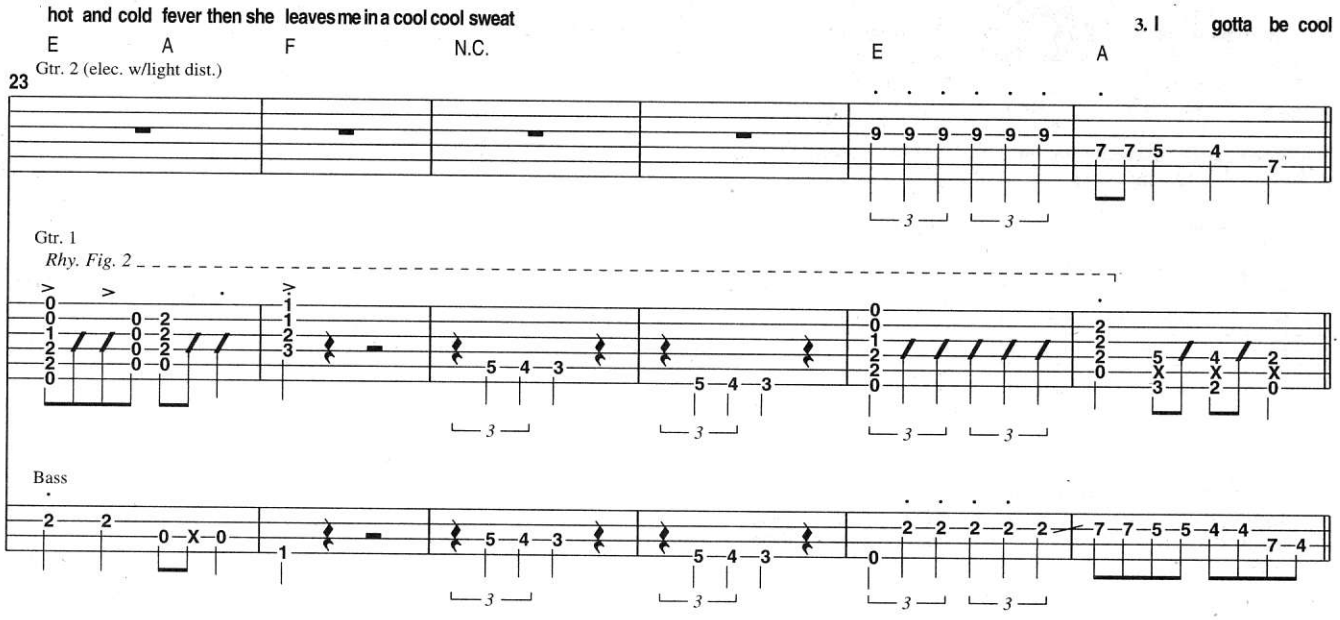
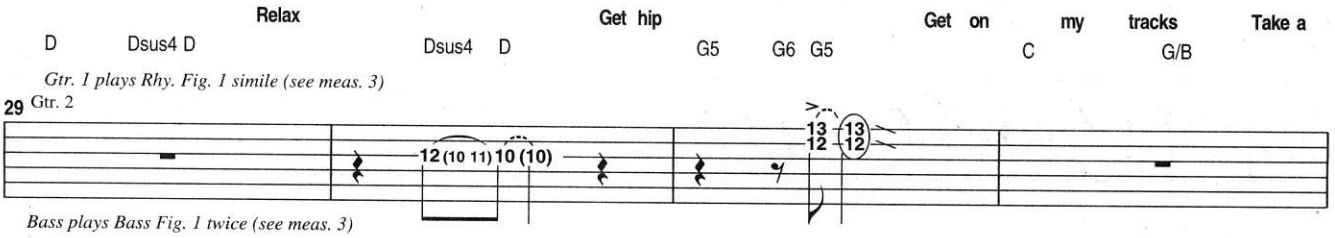
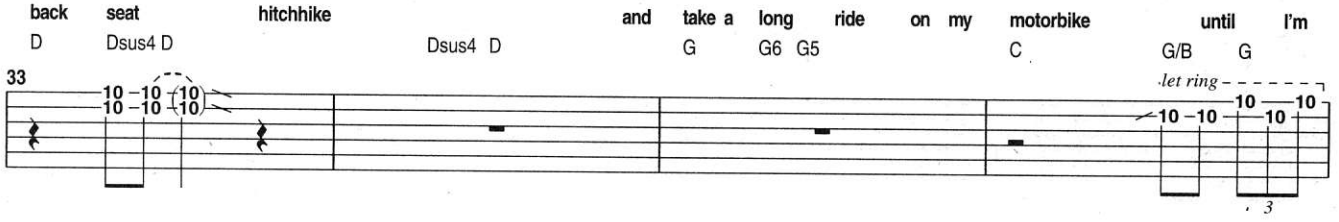
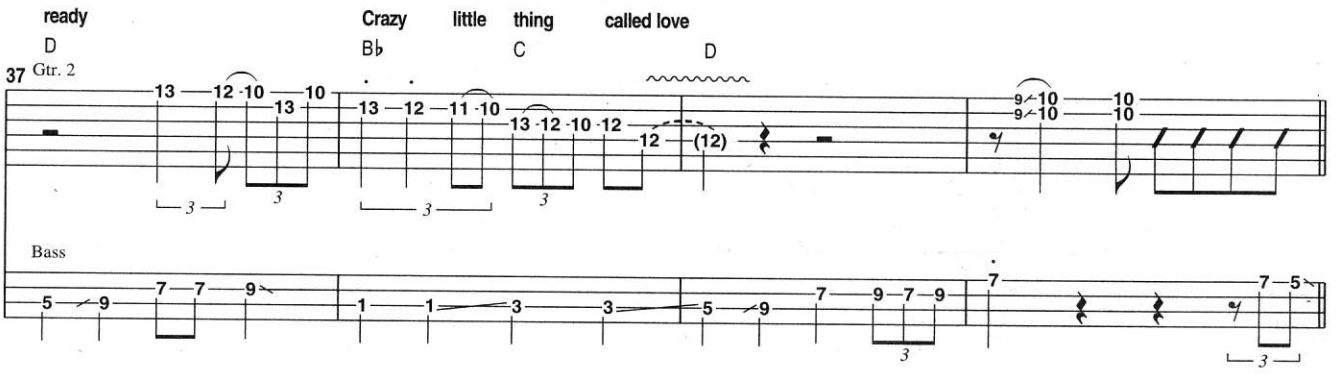


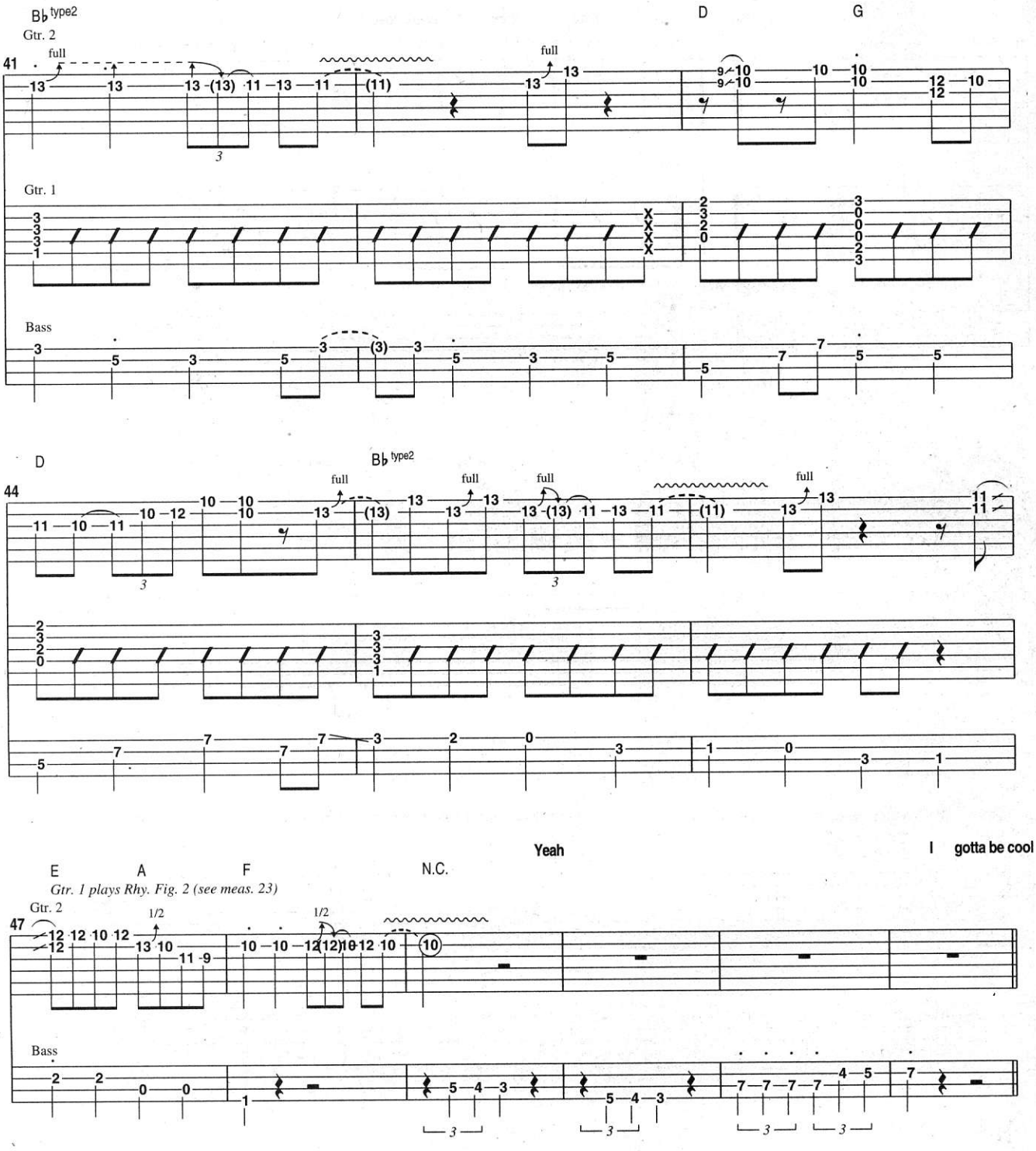
D **3rd Verse** (1:02)





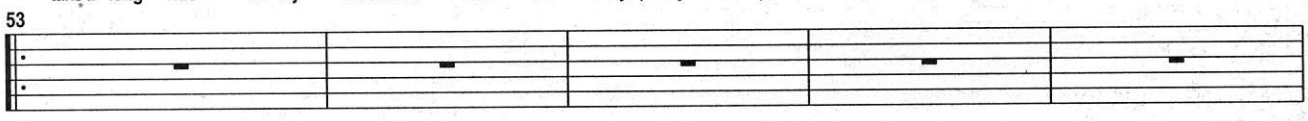


E **Guitar Solo** (1:21)



F **4th Verse (a capella)** (1:40)

take a long ride relax on my motorbike until get hip I'm ready (ready an' get on Freddie) my tracks Crazy little thing called love Take a backseat hitchhike



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(2nd time) go back to verse **B**

or

5. This thing

G **Outro** (2:12)

Crazy little thing called love

B♭ C III D

58 Gtr. 2

Gtr. 1

Bass

Rhy. Fig. 3

Crazy little thing called love (yeah yeah)

B♭ C III D

Crazy little thing called love (yeah yeah)

B♭ C III D

Gtr. 1 plays Rhy. Fig. 3 until fade (see meas. 59)

61 Gtr. 2

Bass

Crazy little thing called love (yeah yeah)

B♭ C III D

Crazy little thing called love (yeah yeah)

B♭ C III D

Crazy little thing called love

B♭ C III

65

Bass Fig. 2

fade out

(Yeah yeah)

D

Crazy little thing called love (yeah yeah)

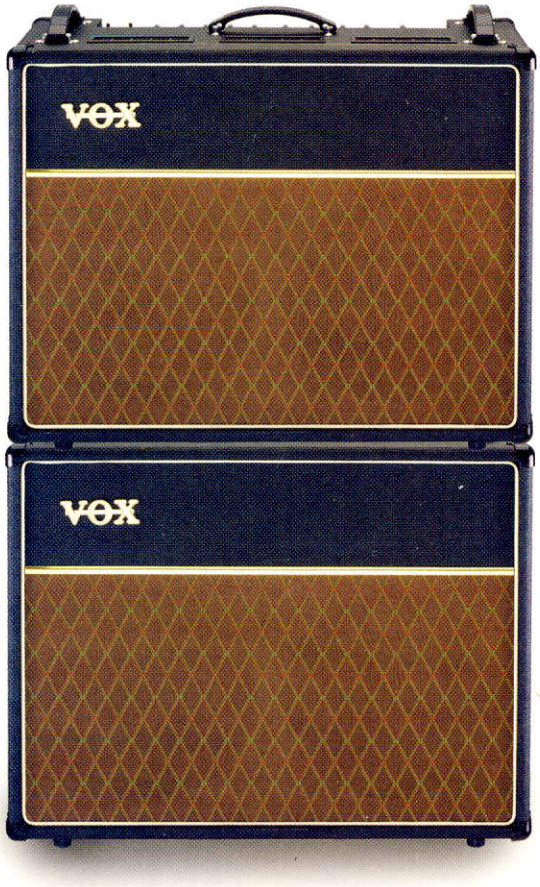
B♭ C III D

G open

70

Bass plays Bass Fig. 3 until fade (see meas. 68)

Everything to make the rockin' world go round.



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